

A Change of Perspective:
The Pre-Graduate Expectations versus Post-College Experiences of Theatre Arts Majors

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Dedication

For my beloved husband, Phil.
Partner in life. Partner in art.

For all the many times you encouraged me with the words, “You can do this!”
I can finally say, “I did it!”

Abstract

Though there has been a great deal of research on the transition into college, there has been relatively little research on the transition out of college. This is particularly true in relation to theatre arts majors. Though recent graduates face many challenges post-college, there has been minimal exploration done on how graduates experience discrepancies between their pre-graduate expectations formed in college versus their actual post-college experiences. This qualitative study sought to explore the post-college transition experiences of 20 recent theatre arts baccalaureates (12 males and 8 females) and the discrepancy between their pre-graduate expectations and post-college experiences based on Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984) as a conceptual model. This model posits the type of transition (non-event), and four coping resources (situation, support, self, and strategies) for managing individual transition experiences. The results of the study identified four primary themes which impacted the post-college experiences of the study participants: (a) Undergraduate Preparedness, (b) Career, Finances, and Other Factors, (c) Discrepancy between Pre-Graduate Expectations versus Post-College Experiences, and (d) Artist Identity. In addition, the results of the study revealed that each of the 20 participants encountered a discrepancy between their pre-graduate expectations versus post-college experiences. The results of the study provide support for adding a new dimension to Schlossberg's Transition Theory model as it relates to a psychological response that occurs within an individual when they encounter a discrepancy between what they thought would happen after college and what actually occurred post-college. A micro-transition is the psychological "change of perspective" (COP) by an individual regarding the macro-transition experience that results from the

realization of a discrepancy between expectations and actual experiences. Implications for this study address undergraduate programming, faculty preparation, and alumni and theater organizations to better prepare theatre arts baccalaureates for the transition to post-college life.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	i
Dedication.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Figures.....	xv
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Rising Cost of Tuition and Student Debt.....	4
The Value of a Liberal Arts Degree.....	6
Accountability and Student Affairs Initiatives.....	7
Statement of the Problem.....	9
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions.....	11
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
Introduction.....	12
A Career in the Arts.....	13
Post-College Preparation.....	16
Cumulative Learning Experiences and Senior-Year Programs.....	20
Psychological and Psychosocial Transition Challenges.....	25
Cognitive Theory.....	29
Self-Efficacy Theory.....	28
Cognitive Dissonance Theory.....	32
Self-Discrepancy Theory.....	34

Development Theory.....	35
Human Development Theory and Young Adults.....	35
Erickson’s Life Span Development.....	36
Emerging Adulthood.....	37
The Millennial Generation.....	40
Identity Theory and Formation.....	43
Marcia’s Identity Crisis and Commitment.....	44
Josselson’s Identity Formation in Women.....	46
Artist Identity.....	47
Transition Theory.....	49
Theoretical Perspective.....	49
Schlossberg’s Transition Theory.....	51
Conceptual Framework.....	56
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	60
Research Design.....	60
Researcher Perspective.....	63
Human Subject’s Approval.....	65
Research Subjects.....	66
Participant Criteria.....	66
Participant Demographics.....	67
Participant Recruitment.....	68
Procedure.....	73

Pilot Testing.....	73
Interview Protocol.....	74
Determine Type of Interview.....	74
Use Adequate Recording Procedure.....	75
Use an Interview Guide.....	75
Determine Place for Conducting Interview.....	76
Obtain Consent from Interview to Participate in Study.....	76
Use Good Interview Procedures.....	77
Interview Questions.....	77
Data Analysis.....	79
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS.....	83
The Participants.....	83
Analysis of Findings from Participant Interviews.....	92
Themes.....	92
First Theme-Pre-Graduate Expectations: Undergraduate Preparedness.....	93
Faculty Impact on Theatre Arts Major's Experiences.....	94
Positive Contributors.....	95
Mentor/Mentee Relationship.....	95
Academic/Professional Development Opportunities...	98
Faculty Professional Training and Industry Experience.....	101
Negative Contributors.....	101

Faculty-Student Conflict and Impact on Students' Confidence.....	101
Resistance to Outside Professional Opportunities.....	105
Lack of Professional Training and Industry Experience in Faculty.....	105
Post-College Preparation Opportunities.....	106
Positive Contributors.....	107
Post-College Preparation Courses.....	107
Internship Opportunities.....	109
Teaching Artists.....	110
Negative Contributors.....	110
Lack of Post-College Preparation Courses.....	111
Lack of Internship Opportunities.....	112
Bachelor of Arts versus Bachelor of Fine Arts Programs.....	113
Negative Contributors.....	114
Positive Contributors.....	117
Second Theme: Post-College Experiences: Career, Finances, and Other Factors.....	117
Career.....	118
Geographical Location.....	119
Other Theatre Cities.....	119
Twin Cities Location.....	121
Auditions.....	123

Finding Gigs.....	125
Gigs for Pay.....	125
Gigs for Experience.....	127
Freelance Lifestyle.....	129
Finances.....	130
Survival Day Jobs.....	131
Family Financial Support.....	134
Student Loan Debt.....	136
Cost of Living.....	137
Other Factors.....	138
Relationships.....	139
Graduate School.....	143
Alternative Career Path.....	146
Third Theme: Discrepancies Between Pre-Graduate Expectations versus Post-College Experiences.....	146
Feelings and Expectations at the Time of College Graduation.....	147
Negative Feelings.....	148
Mixed Feelings.....	149
Positive Feelings.....	151
Expectations for Post-College Life.....	152
Career Expectations at Time of Graduation.....	152
Experiences for Post-College Life.....	154
Career Experiences.....	155

Financial Experiences.....	159
Other Factors.....	161
Discrepancies Between Expectations versus Experiences.....	163
Fourth Theme: Artist Identity: Then and Now.....	167
Artist Identity at Time of College Graduation.....	168
Seeking Validation.....	169
Realization of Artist Identity.....	172
Level of Self-Confidence.....	174
Artist Identity Post-College.....	174
Pursuing Their Calling.....	175
Changing Priorities.....	177
Comparing Self to Others.....	179
Artist as Labeling.....	181
Identity as Artist of Color.....	182
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	183
Schlossberg's Transition Theory.....	183
Pre-Graduate Expectations: Undergraduate Preparedness.....	185
Relation to Schlossberg's Transition Theory.....	186
Post-College Experiences: Career, Finances, and Other Factors.....	189
Relation to Schlossberg's Transition Theory.....	194
Discrepancies between Pre-Graduate Expectations versus Post-College Experiences.....	196
Relation to Schlossberg's Transition Theory.....	201

Artist Identity: Then and Now.....	203
Artist Identity at the Time of College Graduation.....	204
Seeking Validation.....	204
Realization of Artist Identity.....	205
Level of Self-Confidence.....	205
Artist Identity Post-College.....	206
Pursuing Their Calling.....	206
Changing Priorities.....	206
Comparing Self to Others.....	207
Artist as Labeling.....	208
Identity as Artist of Color.....	208
Relation to Schlossberg's Transition Theory.....	209
A Proposed Model.....	211
A Proposed Model of Micro-Transition.....	213
Importance of the Study.....	216
Implications.....	217
Implications for Undergraduate Programming for Theatre Arts Programs.....	219
Post-College Preparation Business and Lifestyle Courses.....	219
Real World Teaching Artists.....	221
Actor Preparation and Audition Technique Courses.....	222
Internship and Work Study Opportunities.....	222
BA versus BFA Programming.....	223

Implications for Faculty.....	224
Implications for Alumni Organizations.....	224
Implications for Professional Theaters.....	226
Limitations.....	227
Data Collection Method.....	227
Self-Reported Data.....	227
Researcher Perspective.....	228
Geographical Location.....	229
Research Timeframe.....	230
Areas for Future Research.....	230
Data Collection Method.....	230
Geographical Location.....	231
Other Demographics.....	232
Conclusion.....	232
REFERENCES.....	236
APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM AND INFORMATION SHEET.....	250
APPENDIX B: RESEARCH STUDY RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENT.....	252
APPENDIX C: INFORMATION LETTER FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS.....	253
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	255

List of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Transition for Recent College Graduates.....	57
Figure 2. Proposed Model of Micro-Transition.....	212

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

While these transitions are often rife with difficulties, college graduates today are facing unique obstacles in cutting a path toward independence and economic self-reliance. (p. 9)

*Life After College: The Challenging Transitions
of the Academically Adrift Cohort*

-- Josipa Roksa and Richard Arum, 2012

I knew it would be hard. I think everyone knows it is going to be hard, but you don't know what that means. You don't know... what does that mean -- 'hard?' I think that in going out into the real world you start to see. And I think experiencing it and pounding the pavement, I understood what they meant by hard. Because you can't really teach a student it's going to be hard... what does that mean? Until you get the "noes."

*On the post-college transition and
life as a theatre artist*

-- Derrick, study participant

The transition to life after college can be challenging for many college graduates. Recent baccalaureates face changes in multiple areas in their lives, such as career and finances, housing and relocation, and personal relationships and social groups during the post-college transition process. These new experiences can be especially challenging if graduates' expectations about how life will be after graduation is different in undesired ways during their post-college transition. Recent graduates may have set expectations regarding their personal and professional goals that do not turn out as expected. Though certainly not all unexpected outcomes are negative, perceived discrepancies between established beliefs and actual outcomes may lead to psychological conflict if graduates encounter obstacles in their path after college. This lack of congruity between the established beliefs and eventual outcomes of recent college graduates was explored in this qualitative study on the transition to post-college life.

Unexpected and undesired post-college outcomes may be especially problematic for students graduating with a degree in the performing arts (such as theatre majors), since creating a viable and lucrative career as an artist is generally difficult to achieve based on limited opportunities and income potential in the arts industry (Carnevale, Cheah, & Strohl, 2012; Hershbein, Harris, & Kearney, 2014). A graduate with a degree in theatre arts will likely experience a job market that is unstable and intermittent with low pay for the majority of those individuals seeking a life as a professional artist: “It is an unwritten truth of the field that not all graduates will have a full-time career in the arts” (Tran, 2014, p. 53). Unfortunately, few studies have characterized the actual post-college lives of performing arts graduates.

Graduates across all disciplines face similar challenges in their transition to post-college life, but those students graduating with a liberal arts degree typically face greater financial concerns due to their chosen career path (Arum & Roska, 2014a; Carnevale et al., 2012; Schneider, 2013; Supiano, 2014b). Liberal arts baccalaureate graduates generally earn less in their early careers than other more lucrative fields, such as science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), or business (Berrett, 2014; Carnevale et al.; Hershbein et al., 2014; Occupational, 2012; Supiano, 2014a). Recent college graduates from liberal arts programs often enter a marketplace with fewer options for salaried positions and less opportunity to work in their chosen field due to its highly competitive nature (Carnevale et al.; Gaquin & NEA, 2008; NEA, 2011b, 2013; Oam & Wyganowska, 2008). A survey of recent college arts graduates found that “liberal-arts and performing-arts graduates tend to be lower paid, deeper in debt, less happily

employed, and slightly more likely to wish they'd done things differently" (Dua, 2013, p. 5).

Financial and career struggles may be especially challenging for theatre arts baccalaureates, since theatre arts graduates consistently rank at the bottom of reported annual income for liberal arts majors, with less likelihood of full-time, stable employment opportunities mainly due to the nature of the entertainment industry (NEA, 2011a, 2011b; 2013; Occupational, 2012). Theatre arts majors enter a very competitive market where "students graduating from theatre programs, armed with a diploma and a big bill, are facing an unstable, highly saturated job market" (Tran, 2014, p. 50).

Over 1.8 million students graduated with a bachelor's degree during the 2014-2015 academic year (NCES, 2016b). Of these students, over 97,000 graduated with a degree in the performing and visual arts; of which 9,229 graduated with a degree in Theatre Arts (NCES, 2016b). Though the number of performing and visual arts baccalaureates represents a significant number of graduates entering the workforce annually, little research has been conducted on theatre arts graduates and their specific post-college challenges. Though a great deal of research and resulting programming in higher education institutions has gone into preparing and supporting undergraduates for their transition *into* college (Gardner, 1999; Gardner and Upcraft, 1989; Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998; Sidle & McReynolds, 2009), little research has been conducted on their transition *out* of college (2011; Gardner, 1999). This gap in the research literature is significant, as recent graduates face many significant transition challenges from college to post-college life, including career, financial, and psychosocial challenges.

Transition periods, such as the transition to life after college, may be challenging for recent graduates as it entails a period of adjustment. Old roles are shed as new roles are acquired based on evolving circumstances. Nancy Schlossberg (1984) studied the experiences of adults in transition, including young adults. Schlossberg described this self-evolution as a time when “people moving through transitions inevitably must take stock as they renegotiate these roles” (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 23). Goodman et al. also noted that transition is based on how an individual perceives and copes with change, and that significant life events may seem “frightening” to some people. For recent graduates, facing unexpected challenges in the post-college landscape may be disconcerting.

Rising Cost of Tuition and Student Debt

The rising cost of a college education is financially challenging for many students and their families. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the average cost for tuition, fees, room and board for four-year institutions during the 2014-2015 academic year was \$25,409 (NCES, 2016b). The type of institution that students attend can vary this cost substantially. The median cost for in-state tuition, fees, and board in 2014-2015 was \$16,188 for public and \$41, 970 for private four-year institutions (NCES, 2016b). Tuition has risen substantially in recent years with an increase of approximately 26% for private colleges, and over 40% for public colleges’ tuition and fees between 2006 and 2016 (Trends in College, 2015).

In conjunction with rising tuition costs, many students emerge from their college programs with substantial student debt loads. This financial burden (occurring directly after graduation) puts additional strain on college graduates. Recent graduates may not be

able to make their loan payments, as student debt is difficult to renegotiate, and has led to increasing student loan default rates (Hershbein et al., 2014; Woo & Soldner, 2013).

Several recent studies have examined the student debt crisis and have found that students are facing an unprecedented amount of debt, adding significant financial struggles in meeting basic cost-of-living expenses for recent baccalaureate graduates (Hershbein, et al.; Schneider, 2013, Woo & Soldner, 2013). Loan debt for many graduating students makes it increasingly difficult to gain traction on the route to adulthood, inhibiting their ability to obtain home or car loans, thus delaying emerging adults from the many rites of passages of traditional adulthood (Flannery, 2014).

The current average student debt load for a bachelor's degree is \$29,400 (Woo, 2014). The amount of debt is particularly high for students in certain majors in the liberal arts, especially performing arts majors, and even more so if arts students attend prestigious arts programs. With theatre majors ranking in the highest percentage of ratio of income-to-student debt among all majors, debt can be a significant challenge for these emerging artists (Hershbein et al., 2014). Leaving college with high student debt loads is particularly challenging for theatre arts majors, which according to one study on majors and income, have the highest college loan repayment challenges among other majors, topping off at 11%, compared to 4% of students who majored in engineering (Hershbein et al.). The same study found that median earnings for student loan repayment by major found that drama and theatre arts majors are also at the highest end of the spectrum at 25%, compared to engineers at 5% (Hershbein et al.). One theatre major who was surveyed for an article on student debt for artists stated, "jobs are scarce, pay is low, and unless I become exceedingly wealthy through fame or a triple-digit earnings, these loans

will never be paid” (Tran, 2014, p. 53). Though several of the participants in this study had family financial support to help pay for college tuition and student loan debt, theatre arts baccalaureates face one of the greatest challenges not only in terms of student loans, but also in their ability to find stable and well-paying jobs in their field, which several study participants noted in their comments about financial challenges in the results of this study.

The Value of a Liberal Arts Degree

Colleges and universities continue to be under public scrutiny regarding the value of a liberal arts degree as fewer graduates are able to find desirable jobs that cover the combined financial burden of rising living costs and educational debt. A recent report on student debt (Stainburn, 2013) found that the career path a student chooses can have significant consequences to quality of life, especially since large student debt is easily and quickly acquired during the college years. Stainburn noted, “Pick a college or field that doesn't set you up for a job that's lucrative enough to pay back loans and you could spend years just scraping by” (para 2). Public concerns over the value of a college education may be particularly applicable to students who earn a degree in the liberal arts, which are often perceived as leading to less lucrative careers (Gaquin & NEA, 2008; NEA, 2011a; Occupational, 2012).

Although the value of a liberal arts degree continues to be under public scrutiny, proponents feel a degree in the arts is beneficial on multiple, less-tangible levels. Intrinsically, the “arts make us empathetic and tolerant, draw meaning into our lives, teach us to think creatively, and on a larger scale draw economic benefits to communities, even though the extrinsic value of a major in the arts is still under tough public scrutiny”

(O'Connor, 2011, para. 9). In fact, the arts as a major field of study is continually being examined by the public and by higher education institutions for public accountability on the dollar value of such a degree (Berrett, 2014; Brooks & Everett, 2009; Carnevale et al., 2012; O'Connor, 2011).

With this level of financial and time commitment from students and their families, there is increasing interest in determining if students are receiving the resources and preparation that they need in order to succeed in life after college, and how post-college outcomes affect the well-being of recent graduates (Dua, 2013; Hardie, 2014; Konstam, Celen-Demirtas, Tomek, & Sweeney, 2015). Rising concerns of the value of a college degree has spurred higher education institutions to demonstrate greater accountability to various public constituents. The focus on accountability has generated greater focus on student affair initiatives and resources to better prepare students for a successful transition from school to work. Post-college outcomes have increasingly become more relevant in the context of changes in higher education in recent years (AACC 2014; Arum & Roska, 2014a; Roska & Arum, 2012; Will, 2015). Colleges and universities have begun to respond to concerns about the high cost of college with increased accountability measures, including student affair initiatives that address post-college preparation, as concerns over the value of a liberal arts degree continue to come under public scrutiny.

Accountability and Student Affairs Initiatives

In the field of higher education, most colleges and universities have primarily addressed the needs of first-year students transitioning into college and the first-year experience, rather than the needs of seniors transitioning out of college (Gardner, 1999). The post-college challenges for recent baccalaureate graduates are significant yet receive

little attention. This lack of preparation leaves many students unprepared for the challenges of post-college life (Arum & Roksa, 2014b; Gardner, 1999; Gardner & Vander Veer, 1998). In relation to college student development, there has been a significant amount of research conducted on the transition into college, resulting in wide-spread first-year experience programs and resources for entering students (Barefoot, 2000; Gardner 1998; Purdie & Rosser, 2011). First-year experience programming assists new students to navigate the many challenges they encounter upon embarking on their college career. However, there has been little corresponding research or programming on the transition out of college, leaving far fewer programs directed specifically to assist college seniors preparing for their post-baccalaureate career and life after college (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Hunter, Keup, Kinzie, & Maietta, 2012).

Though college students routinely have access to a career center as the institutional default resource for post-college preparation, college seniors have far fewer resources and programming that focus on transition issues, including resources that address the multitude of non-career related post-graduation concerns such as financial and housing issues. The level of post-college preparation that students perceive they have acquired may be closely related to how effective recent baccalaureate graduates navigate the post-college transition (Arum & Roksa, 2014a). In particular, students may emerge from their college education with preconceived ideas of what life after college will be like, which is defined in this study as “pre-graduate expectations.” These graduates may encounter unforeseen stress when these expectations result in experiences during the transition to life after college that are different – and less desirable – than their original expectations. The actual experiences that these recent graduates encounter in the

immediate years after receiving their college degree is defined in this study as “post-college experiences.”

Student affairs initiatives that effectively prepare college seniors as they embark upon their post-college life may assist students with skills and resources to effectively navigate life after college (Arum & Roksa, 2014a; Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998; Hora, Benbow, & Oleson, 2016; Hunter et al., 2012). Colleges and universities are increasingly offering post-college preparation resources such as senior seminars and workshops that address career and life issues after college. However, much of this programming is general in nature, and often major-specific. Theatre arts majors often do not have access to the same level of post-college programming and seek opportunities that are specific to their career track. These types of offerings may include, but are not limited to, audition preparation courses, bringing in “teaching artists” to conduct workshops about current best practices in the theatre industry and “real life” as theatre practitioners, and learning how to effectively navigate networking as independent freelance contractors. Such major-specific post-college programming may better prepare theatre majors for the transition out of college and could help theatre majors navigate the transition process as they move from the point of graduation toward their intended goals, including better managing the cognitive restructuring associated with disparity between expectations and actual experiences encountered by recent graduates in their attempt to reach specific goals in their lives.

Statement of the Problem

Minimal research has been conducted on the post-college transition experience of recent graduates, and even less research has focused on the transition process of

performing arts majors – and theatre arts majors in particular. This study explores the perceived discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations versus actual post-college experiences of theatre arts majors and how that impacts these individuals.

Recent college graduates face many challenges during the transition to post-college life. Though a significant amount of literature exists on the transition into college, little research has been conducted on the transition out of college and the resulting challenges that recent baccalaureate graduates face in post-college life. Minimal exploration has been done on how graduates experience discrepancies when what they believed would happen after college does not match what they actually encounter during the post-college transition. Numerous studies have found that liberal arts degree graduates are more likely to face economic and career challenges than other majors in business, science, or technology, and even other liberal arts majors (Hershbein et al., 2014; O'Connor, 2011; Woo, 2014; Woo & Soldner, 2013). Specifically, little to no research has been conducted on the transition experiences of theatre arts baccalaureate graduates, particularly in relation to perceived discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations and actual post-college experiences. Thus, exploring the expectations versus experiences of recent theatre arts graduates is warranted.

The importance of understanding the transition from college to post-college life is relevant to higher education study for purposes of college student development and institutional programming related to post-college preparation. It is also critical for the graduates and their families who invest a significant amount of time and money in obtaining a college degree which may or may not lead to expected outcomes. A greater understanding of how theatre arts graduates perceive and navigate the post-college

transition when it is different than expected may inform and assist higher education institutions, arts graduates, parents, employers, and the theatre industry to identify strategies that may better prepare these graduates for non-linear career and life paths after college.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study examined the post-college transition experiences and artist identity of recent theatre arts graduates through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995) in relation to perceived discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations versus actual post-college experiences. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What are the undergraduate experiences of theatre arts majors that contribute to the pre-graduate preparation and expectations for the transition to post-college life?
- 2) What are the career and life events that contribute to the post-college transition experiences of recent theatre arts majors?
- 3) Are there perceived discrepancies between the pre-graduate expectations and the post-college experiences of theatre arts graduates during the transition to life after college, and if so, what are the dimensions along which these perceived discrepancies occur?
- 4) How do recent theatre arts majors make sense of their identity as artists during the pre-graduate to post-college transition, and how is their identity impacted by perceived discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations and post-college experiences?

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The pertinent literature for this qualitative study on the post-college transition falls into five categories: (a) Career in the Arts, (b) Post-College Preparation, (c) Cognitive Theory, (d) Developmental Theory, and (e) Transition Theory. I begin this chapter with a general overview of pursuing a career in the arts, followed by an overview of the undergraduate preparation and programming related to the post-college transition experience. This is followed by a discussion on the three theoretical areas that align with my research topic on discrepancy between expectations and experiences: cognitive theory, developmental theory, and transition theory.

The first theoretical section reviews the literature on cognitive theory and discusses Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977, 1993, 1997), (Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory (1957, 1962) and Higgin's Self-Discrepancy Theory (1987. The second theoretical section is on developmental theory, which is divided into two subsections. The first subsection examines lifespan theory and young adults. Lifespan Theory reviews the research of Erickson on lifespan development (1963, 1968, 1980, 1988), as well as more recent literature on Arnett's Emerging Adulthood (1998, 2000, 2001, 2004) and the purported characteristics of the millennial generation – which is the targeted population for this study. The second subsection under developmental theory examines identity formation through the perspectives of theorists Marcia (1966, 1980) and Josselson (1987, 1996). In addition to these formal theories on identity development, I also discuss the unique characteristics of self-identity as an "artist" in relation to the topic of this study on theatre arts baccalaureate graduates.

The third theoretical section of the literature review will discuss Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984, 1995, 2006, 2012), which is the foundation of this research topic on the transition to post-college life. The areas explored in the following literature review emerged after a review of the existing research related to my topic of study and are grounded in the theoretical perspective chosen for this qualitative study.

A Career in the Arts

Recent graduates are often disillusioned in meeting their quality-of-life expectations after investing in a time-intensive and costly undergraduate degree. Graduates often face unemployment, part-time employment, or more frequently, underemployment, which results in questioning the value of a college education. A recent report by the Center for College Affordability and Productivity to examine underemployment in college graduates found that "college graduates are underemployed, performing jobs which require vastly less educational tools than they possess" (Vedder, Denhart, & Robe, 2013, p. 32). It is common to hear about the actor who works as a part-time barista or temporary administrative jobs between acting jobs, which are inherently short term. This underemployment status may call into question the value of pursuing a major in the performing arts.

A recent study that examined the post-college expectations of recent college graduates in over 80 different majors found that there is also a discrepancy in what recent college graduates expected to earn post-college across the spectrum of majors from science, technology and engineering degrees to business and liberal arts degrees (Hershbein et al., 2014). A recent poll of 1,000 graduating college seniors across all majors in 2013 found that only 15 percent thought they would earn less than \$25,000 a

year, while in actuality, 32 percent of their peers who graduated in the previous two years made that amount or less (Smith, LaVelle, & Abbatiello, 2014). A career in the performing arts, a historically underpaid occupation, increases the odds that sustainable financial independence is more challenging for this group of recent college graduates.

College graduates seek to find meaningful work that aligns with their career aspirations and personal standards, even though finding such a combination of ideals in the workforce is challenging (Bidwell, 2013; Dua, 2013; Gabor, 2014; Gaquin & NEA, 2008; Tsoudides and Jome, 2008). A recent study (Hardie, 2014), using longitudinal data from almost 20,000 young adults over a 30-year span, examined occupational aspirations versus career satisfaction and depression, and found that if recent graduates are unable to find a good occupational fit and meet their career expectations, an individual's well-being can be negatively affected as "job satisfaction is strongly related to the gap between young adults' occupational goals and outcomes" (p. 208).

A recent report on college graduates that surveyed almost 5,000 students who graduated between 2009 and 2012 found that liberal arts majors often face lower pay, greater debt, and dissatisfaction in their jobs (Dua, 2013). Luftig, Donovan, Farnbaugh, Kennedy, and Wyszomirski (2003) conducted a study which investigated over 500 undergraduate and graduate students who planned on pursuing a career in the arts and focused on why they chose to do so despite low wages and scarcity of work, which is common in arts-related occupations. Luftig et al. found that these students planned to make contingency plans, such as acquiring certification as an arts instructor if they failed to find employment in their chosen field of endeavor.

Preparation for alternative career options indicates an awareness by recent graduates of the competitiveness of the arts industry. There are 2.1 million artists in the United States, 17% which are performing artists, and 2.7% which are actors (NEA, 2011a). Such high numbers demonstrate the fierce competitiveness for creative work. A report from the National Endowment for the Arts examined how artists fare in the workforce and found that “artists are much more likely than other workers to be self-employed and more likely than other workers to experience sporadic work hours and gaps in employment” (Gaquin & NEA, 2008).

Underemployment is also a significant challenge for recent college graduates across all majors (Bidwell, 2013; Gabor, 2014; Lindemann, Lingo & Tepper, 2013; NEA, 2011b) examined unemployment and underemployment of newly minted arts graduates and found that though unemployment rates for recent graduates in the arts is significant at 7%, underemployment is found to be much higher at 44% among liberal arts graduates. There are just not enough work opportunities for artists, as supply continues to surpass demand, and “the fact remains that there are many more people who aspire to be artists than who end up working professionally as artists” (Lindemann et al., p. 468). Abel, Dietz, and Su (2014) examined the job prospects of recent college graduates and how their choice of major impacts how they fare in the job market. Abel et al. (2014) found that “the underemployment rate for new college graduates has risen substantially since 2000, with a growing number of graduates accepting jobs that are part time or low paying jobs or both” (p. 32). These statistics on the employment of recent college graduates are significant and may impact the level of satisfaction of college graduates. A recent study by Konstam et al. (2015) on the subjective well-being of 184 unemployed, young adults

found that “while emerging adults tends to explore a variety of career opportunities consistent with this developmental period, they are also challenged in terms of finding jobs that are satisfying and longer in duration” (p. 465). Consequently, high unemployment and underemployment rates for arts majors is a significant problem, as it can lead to negative psychological outcomes among recent college graduates (Konstam et al.).

When individuals identify as artists, unrealized career aspirations “may become standards against which they judge themselves,” and not meeting these goals can lead to negative outcomes for their wellbeing (Hardie, 2014, p. 209). Since artists tend to identify strongly with their vocational aspirations in relation to personal fulfillment, not being able to pursue their vocational calling may have negative psychological results. Tsaoudides and Jome (2008) investigated 188 college students in a study on career compromise and found that “the resulting career aspiration/career attainment discrepancy is likely to elicit negative emotions and dissatisfaction” (p. 186). Arts majors who graduate with the expectation that they will have a fulfilling career as an artist and then do not meet that particular outcome may experience identity incongruence, psychological and career challenges, and dissatisfaction with post-college outcomes.

Post-College Preparation

Just as entering first-year students face a host of issues when transitioning to college life, seniors graduating and moving on to their post-college life also face a similar, but different set of transitional concerns during their final year of college and beyond. This evolution from one set of experiences to another may include a wide range of emotions depending on the person’s background and perspective. Goodman et al.

(2006) noted that “a transition is not so much a matter of change as of the individual’s own perception of the change” (p.33). However, for many young adults, how they perceive challenging situations determines if the circumstance warrants a stress response. This perception of stress may be heightened during a period of transition, especially if dealing with ambiguity and unexpected outcomes.

Devonport and Lane (2006) conducted a study on the relationships between retention, coping and self-efficacy in first-year students, and found that individuals who cope with stress by breaking large and difficult tasks down through a short-term plan into smaller, more manageable parts helps to promote self-efficacy in individuals. This same study could just as easily be applied to college seniors. Students on either end of their undergraduate experience must deal with significant frustrations as they finish one phase and start another (Gardner, 1999). College seniors have unique needs as they move through this personal time of transition, including finishing coursework, applying for graduation, preparing for the next stage of their lives, and undergoing a significant personal transition in their lives (Gardner, 1999). Psychological, psychosocial, and career issues, along with perceptions of preparedness for “real-life” after college, are some of the many concerns that college graduates face.

A belief that individuals can achieve something is important and is important for self-esteem and is rooted in how much control individuals have of a situation. College graduates also need to be able to effectively navigate unexpected challenges when they perceive they do not have significant control. The extent to which college graduates perceive they are competent and adequately prepared for a career may also impact their psychological well-being. In their research on college to post-college career transitions

and the impact of individual psychology on level of self-efficacy, Yang and Gysbers (2007) found that "individuals who feel anxious yet confident in identifying their personal values, preferences, and abilities were likely to feel ready for the career transition; they were also concerned about negative outcomes and were fearful about the transition" (p. 167). These additional findings indicate that though baccalaureates may be negatively impacted by psychological distress regarding the transition to career, anxiety can also motivate these students if they feel confident about their own beliefs and values. However, the unknown factor can still ascribe anxiety to the transition to life after college.

A perceived lack of preparedness for life after college may be a significant factor in regard to post-college readiness when students perceive they are missing critical components related to both academic and non-academic aspects of their skills set. However, if recent college graduates perceive a high level of competence and ability to navigate life's many challenges beyond academic and career preparation, this could help them significantly as they move on to the next stages of their lives. As such, holistic preparation of the whole student may be the ideal goal of colleges and universities who hope to turn out confident graduates who are prepared to tackle any issue that comes their way. In their chapter about navigating school to work transition from the book *The Senior Year*, Gardner and Perry (2012) noted that colleges and universities "can assist students by offering opportunities for career exposure, professional work experience, career skill-building, and providing emotional support to guide students' expectations, foster reflection, and help understand the uncertainty that often accompanies this transition" (p. 152).

Students preparing to graduate need to make many significant decisions about their future as they prepare to transition to the next stage of their lives. Most colleges and universities do not provide "life" coaching opportunities or support resources for undergraduates. Developing a broad range of skills to address challenges beyond academic or career related issues may help with effective decision-making during the transition from college and beyond in post-college life. One study conducted by Bowers, Dickman, and Fuqua (2001) on the relationship between student psychosocial and career development found a statistically significant relationship between these two measures. The authors speculated that since students with greater psychosocial development become more involved in career related activities prior to graduation, institutional programming that helped students with career planning that covered the entire undergraduate experience would help in the decision-making process (Bowers et al., 2001). This correlation between psychosocial development and career development and level of preparedness, including more productive decision-making, could also be applied to other types of institutional programming. Colleges and universities that incorporate the development of broader psychosocial skills into their curriculum and co-curricular opportunities may increase student confidence in navigating the transition to post-college life. Helping students develop meta-skills, or abstract psychosocial skills that are broader in application and context, such as critical thinking, dealing with ambiguity, decision-making and effective communication, may assist in acquiring additional skills, such as effective listening, questioning, reasoning, and adapting abilities. These meta-skills may provide additional assistance to students as they navigate around perceived challenges during this transition.

Cumulative learning experiences and senior-year programs. Higher educational institutions that value their seniors and recognize the importance of developing and implementing programming, resources, and support for this vital, though often overlooked student cohort, may reap generous rewards at an individual, institutional and societal level. However, most colleges and universities have primarily addressed the needs of freshmen transitioning *into* college and the first-year experience, rather than the needs of seniors transitioning *out of* college and the final-year experience (Gardner, 1999). Yet, first-year experience and senior-year experience programs address similar if different needs of college students.

John Gardner is considered the founder of the first-year experience since developing his inaugural University 101 seminar course in 1972, which resulted in the development in the mid-1980s of the National Center for the Study of the Freshman Year Experience (Barefoot, 2000; Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998). Drawing on issues related to students transitioning into college, Gardner expanded his work to examine the impact of the transition out of college and is also considered the architect of the senior-year experience movement during the 1990s. Gardner (1999) noted several reasons that colleges and universities should also be paying attention to the experience of college seniors and their transition into the next stage of their lives. These reasons include meeting student and family expectations for an education that will lead to a good job and higher quality of life, adequately preparing students to be employees with the necessary cognitive skills for success, preparing students for life transitions after college, and recognizing that graduates are our future alumni (Gardner, 1999, Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998). However, the transition out of college to post-college life has not received

the same level of attention as the transition into college. Indeed, a review of the literature reveals a significant lack of research on the transition to post-college life.

Inherently, colleges and universities focus much of their time on academic preparedness. Indeed, a coherent curriculum that intentionally prepares the student for life beyond college is the foundation of an undergraduate education, though frequently this ideal is not realized by limitations in academia. Creating a learning environment that purposely engages and prepares students for the post-graduate world may not always be available through institutional resources. Gardner (1999) noted that “students thrive in challenging academic environments characterized by active learning and frequent interaction between students and faculty, but the political economy and structure of many institutions frustrates these practices” (p. 81).

However, by creating a cumulative learning experience that includes learning communities, capstone courses, community service and internship opportunities may create a more coherent undergraduate experience (Gardner, 1999). For example, Gardner and Perry (2012) noted on the transition into the workplace that “upcoming college and university students should expect that an internship should be part of the undergraduate education experience for nearly all graduates” (p. 143). For theatre arts majors, internship experiences that give these students direct contact with the professional theatre world allows them to gain valuable experience, as well as develop professional contacts in the theatre industry even before they graduate. This type of post-college preparation opportunity can provide a cumulative learning experience that may lead to greater opportunities for professional development as well as personal development as emerging theatre artists.

Cumulative learning experiences for college seniors often take the academic form of a senior capstone course or senior project related to their major. This concluding curricular experience has gradually become fairly prevalent at most four-year institutions in recognition that some sort of culminating experience should be added to a student's academic program and assimilating multiple components of their major. A survey of institutions offering these types of senior capstone courses found that over 70 percent of institution respondents indicated a course was the crowning curricular experience for the major in preparation for degree-related fields (Henscheid & Barefoot, 2008). Another study that examined the effect on senior's identification with the institution found support for the senior capstone course, as "the student will feel a greater sense of connection with the community and, at the same time, will come to see herself or himself in a different light" (Collier, 2000, p. 294). However, this identity role change happens differently among students between varying dimensions, including emerging theatre artists.

A few institutions are starting to implement formal college senior-oriented programs and resources, yet it is only a small fraction of the prolific first-year experience programs currently in place across the nation. There appears to be few such senior programs currently in place at colleges and universities, outside of traditional career services programs, that are geared toward the senior transition from college to post-college. In addition, though some institutions are continuing to add more support resources to career services, other curriculum initiatives, such as a senior capstone project or class for a major program may also be helpful with career preparation. Wood (2004) discussed the advantages of implementing a career counseling model and course to help seniors become more prepared for the work place as "students have invested time,

energy, and resources (their own and their parents') in the educational process and, therefore, have high expectations regarding their future employment" (p. 71). However, depending on the depth and breadth of this type of tailored career capstone experience, it may not be enough to help students gain sufficient "real world" experience to help set them apart in a competitive the job market. This is particularly true of theatre arts majors who are seeking a multitude of opportunities to engage with the professional theatre industry prior to college graduation, often in an attempt to develop a strong network of theatre professionals before they leave college.

Colleges and universities have traditionally invested in academic capstone experiences and career programming as the primary senior-year experience, as placement in entry-level jobs linked to degrees has historically been considered a major successful outcome of the undergraduate experience. However, beyond academic and career issues, college seniors face numerous psychological and psychosocial concerns related to the transition out of college and post-graduate life that are often not addressed in the collegiate environment. Henscheid and Barefoot (2008) conducted a survey of senior seminars and capstone courses and found that "less than 5 percent of respondents indicated that their senior seminars or capstone courses were intended to address personal adjustment issues seniors may encounter in their transition out of college" (p. 83). Personal issues may include financial concerns that include student loan debt, housing and transportation costs. In addition, college seniors also face moving away from their "home away from home," leaving friends behind and possibly relocating for a new job or graduate school. Resources and support focused on the senior-year experience and

transition to life after college could help graduates in both the job market as well as their personal lives.

Having a strong skill set that can help students address and deal with ambiguity may be beneficial in the job market, as well as life in general. Colleges and universities need to develop and implement workshops and seminars around these types of personal and practical issues, assist with developing the holistic exploration of our graduating seniors, and assist with the skill development of our future citizens from a local to a global community (Gardner, 1999). Having a set of meta-skills, which include strong conceptualizing, communicating, flexibility, and adaptability may help with the transition from college to career, as well as the many hurdles graduates will face in their life after college. Effective senior-year programming may help students develop the competency and skills necessary to become fully engaged and prepared citizens as they emerge onto society.

Senior-year programming that may have previously been perceived as “icing” on the undergraduate experience may now emerge as a fundamental component of the undergraduate experience. Colleges and universities should continue to respond to public accountability and an increasing interest in the employability and success rates of college graduates beyond just obtaining a diploma. Students preparing to graduate are concerned about the amount of time and money they have invested in their baccalaureate degree, and “the greatest service that higher education can provide to these worried and debt-ridden seniors is solid preparation for life after college” (Henscheid, 2008, p. 22). As Gardner (1999) noted on the senior-year experience, colleges and universities should start with our college seniors who are a captive audience, and also our last chance to help them

succeed after graduation. To deliver the best return on students' and their families' investment, we need to help our emerging graduates have the best chance at developing the skills and competencies that will help them through a lifetime. Gardner (1999) summed it up as "the senior year is the last window of opportunity to address this potential deficit before students leave our custodianship" (p. 6). It should be the responsibility of our institutions of higher education to deliver on this promise.

Psychological and psychosocial transition challenges. In developing a career counseling model for undergraduates in their final year, Wood (2004) determined that as college seniors contemplate the many issues and decisions they face regarding their future, it is quite natural for many of them to feel stress and anxiety about the next stage of their lives. When faced with the prospect of their career goals, many seniors may feel that they did not do "enough" in college through engagement or research opportunities. Even if college seniors feel that they made the right choices and strategies regarding their major and career preparation, simply perceiving they will be unable to land a job in their field may feel daunting. Thus, as college seniors approach graduation, they may feel unsure of themselves and tentative about their next steps (Wood). Theatre arts majors who feel that they did not adequately prepare for post-college life by engaging in theater internship opportunities or other post-college preparation programs may not feel adequately prepared for a life in the theatre industry.

Students before and after college graduation often find that this transitional period may feel quite ambiguous (Gardner, 1999). College seniors may be looking forward with excitement to the next stage of their lives, but also feeling anxiety and stress alongside more positive emotions. Micheli and Castelfranchi (2005) analyzed cognitive

components of anxiety in relation to control and determined that anxiety involves a psychological perception of threat to future goals. In addition, anxiety can also put additional stress on a student due to the prolonged waiting period associated with transitional outcomes, which Micheli and Castelfranci called “consequent uncertainty and wait” (p. 293). Emerging theatre artists are likely to experience many gap periods in their career that result in psychological ambiguity as they wait for the next theatre job to come around.

In an empirical study of worry and life satisfaction in college students, worry about a potentially unpleasant future may instigate psychological distress and impact how satisfied students are with their current life situation (Paolini, Yanez, & Kelly, 2006). College seniors who experience psychological distress will likely find that it is more difficult to navigate this transitional period out of college and into the next stage of their lives. Theatre arts majors who prepare to leave college may feel more positive about the next steps in their life and career if they feel confident about their abilities as artists, and especially if they have something related to their career lined up after college graduation. Undergraduate programming that helps to connect students to professional theatre opportunities and network connections in the theatre industry may feel better prepared and less worried about their post-college lives. Studies on anxiety and worry (Calvete & Connor-Smith, 2006; Iglesias et al., 2005; Paolini et al.) find that a perception of support and helping students effectively manage the stress in their lives encourages coping skills, decreases distress, and improves life satisfaction.

In addition to psychological issues, many college seniors also face psychosocial issues related to their interpersonal relationships and perceived support system. In

Gardner's (1998) review of the senior-year experience, with impending graduation, many seniors find it difficult to leave college friendships, faculty, and organizations in which they were involved. The loss of social support that was formed during their undergraduate years makes it difficult for many graduates to leave college, as spending several years in one community creates, in essence, a second home with a "family" consisting of mostly one's own choosing, making it especially difficult to contemplate leaving. Theatre arts majors may feel a significant loss when leaving their theatre arts program behind when they graduate. For many theatre arts majors, their theatre community is one of the strongest social supports they have in college, often based on the close nature of rehearsing and performing theatre productions with their peers, and also working closely with their theatre professors. Not only do graduates face the loss of one community, but they also worry about whether they will find a new support community.

An exploratory factor analysis of the Senior Concerns Survey found that as graduation approaches, seniors consider what support systems will or will not be part of their post-graduate life and consider leaving college friendships behind and finding a new community to be significant issues related to change and loss (Pistilli, Taub, & Bennett, 2003). College seniors may witness a reduction in psychological distress if they perceive they have a social support network in place to help cope with the challenges of the senior year transition. For theatre majors who have established a strong faculty-student mentorship, this interpersonal connection can provide support for students during their undergraduate years, but also as a connection point for their post-college lives if they feel they have someone in place to connect with about post-college challenges in their lives as emerging theatre artists.

The many issues described above regarding college seniors' perceptions of whether they are adequately prepared and ready for post-college life can lead to considerable challenges among college seniors as they prepare for the transition to the next stage of their lives. Effective post-college preparation is particularly relevant to theatre arts majors embarking on the transition to a freelance career as a theatre artist and the specific challenges connected with the unique lifestyle associated with the theatre industry.

Cognitive Theory

In relation to the transition out of college, graduates may face psychological challenges when they encounter a disparity between their preconceived expectations and resulting experiences if they do not align with their post-college expected outcomes. The theory of self-efficacy, cognitive dissonance and the associated theory of self-discrepancy theory provide an explanation for how individuals cope with discrepancy and attempt to resolve psychological dissonance and self-perception when their ideals are not realized. This psychological adjustment is common in any type of transition experience (Goodman et al., 2006).

Self-efficacy theory. When individuals encounter expectations in their plans, how they manage to navigate these challenges can lie within the individual's characteristics and behaviors. Perceived self-efficacy is the "belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997b, p. 3). The level of self-efficacy that a person has may impact goal outcomes, including post-college personal and career goals. This may be especially important when college graduates encounter discrepancies between their expectations and actual experiences in

life after college. Self-efficacy can help a person navigate unexpected challenges and “enables a person to tackle a new problem with an optimistic expectation that it will be solvable, in other words, that one can cope effectively with it,” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 105). A review of self-efficacy is important to explore regarding the transition to post-college life.

Self-efficacy is important to the transition out of college because it is the psychological barrier to perceived challenges. Bandura (1977, 1993, 1997b) found that people who doubt themselves avoid difficult tasks, lack motivation, give up quickly when confronted with challenges, and lack commitment to pursuing goals, but those high in self-efficacy look at barriers as positive challenges and are motivated to work through challenges in reaching their goals. In short, “beliefs of personal efficacy are active contributors to, rather than mere inert predictors of, human attainments. People make things happen rather than simply passively observing themselves undergoing behavioral happenings” (Bandura, 1997b, p. 39). Bandura also determined that “perceived self-efficacy is not a measure of the skills one has, but a belief about what one can do under different sets of conditions with whatever skills one possesses” (p. 37).

A self-perception of incompetence or inability to effectively navigate potential obstacles may be stressful for many college graduates, especially when life after college is an unknown quantity. When it comes to making important choices, a lack of self-confidence in one's own ability to make effective decisions or loss of control about their future can lead to feelings of inadequacy, thus leading to additional stress during the post-college transition. Bandura (1997a) indicated that self-efficacy is related to people's

perceived control over life events and that "they have a stronger incentive to act if they believe that control is possible and that their action will be effective" (p. 4).

Bandura (1997b) noted that perceived self-efficacy is regulated through four ways of human functioning: cognitive, motivational, mood or affect, and depression. People with a high perception of self-efficacy are more likely to have high aspirations, challenge themselves, and visualize successful outcomes. Goodman et al. (2006) noted the importance of self-efficacy in making a positive change during a transition as it "enables a person to tackle a new problem with an optimistic, expectation that it will be solvable... that one can cope effectively with it" (p. 104). In addition, individuals are motivated by what they believe they can accomplish and take proactive actions to obtain their goals. Bandura (1997b) found that "perceived self-efficacy is concerned not with the number of skills you have, but with what you believe you can do with what you have under a variety of circumstances" (p. 37). Also, if individuals think they can cope with difficult situations, they are less likely to be distressed, have less stress and anxiety, and have better control over negative thought patterns. Finally, individuals with low self-efficacy may experience more depression by engaging in recurrent depressive thoughts that decrease hope and leads to a downward spiral, which also leads to poor social support systems that compound stressful situations (Bandura, 1997b).

When examining the influence of self-efficacy on learning outcomes of the college years, Stage, Watson, and Terrell (1999) found that "self-efficacy also contributed to the type of social reality students construct for themselves through selection processes. Self-efficacy beliefs shape students' lives through their influence on selection of activities, environment, and careers." (p. 31). Stage et al. also found that

"self-efficacy beliefs influence individual's feelings, thinking, motivation, and behaviors" (p. 31). If graduating seniors do not believe that they are adequately prepared to make informed decisions about their life's direction, there may be a sense of self-doubt, inadequacy, and the inability to take on future challenges. In relation to the college senior experience, students with high cognitive perception of self-efficacy may be better prepared to manage the challenges of senior year and the transition out of college. In addition, theatre arts majors who have a high perception of self-efficacy in relation to their skill set as an artist may be able to better navigate the ambiguity of a theatre career, where the constant cycle of rejection for competitive theatre jobs may cause negative psychological responses and impact their sense of competency and identity in their chosen career.

Bandura (1997a) noted that coping strategies regulate emotional states that help individuals control their response, and "people with high self-efficacy lower their stress and anxiety by acting in ways that make the environment less threatening" (p. 4). In addition, mood and affect closely correlate to anxiety or depression experienced by individuals going through the post-college transition experience. Bandura (1997a) also stated that individuals who lack a strong sense of self-efficacy "slacken or give up in the face of difficulty, recover slowly from setbacks, and easily fall victim to stress and depression" (p. 5). If individuals do not have a strong sense of self-efficacy, they may be filled with self-doubt, feel inadequate, and avoid challenges, such as those encountered on the journey of life after college.

Betz (2004) explored how self-efficacy impacts career options and achievements, and how low self-efficacy can lead to negative self-talk and anxiety responses which

impairs performance. Betz (2004) noted that self-efficacy can impact persistence through obstacles in the attainment of goals, and that "low self-efficacy may be, in effect, a self-fulfilling prophecy" (p. 52). For example, a recent theatre major may audition for multiple shows and still not obtain a role in a theater production, thereby resulting in a negative psychological outcome if they perceive their efforts as a fruitless endeavor. However, a high level of self-efficacy may help with maneuvering around perceived challenges with actions that may produce a different outcome, such as acquiring additional theater skills training, networking with theatre professionals, and auditioning for regional theaters in addition to local theaters. In addition, a high perception of self-efficacy can also strengthen their identity as an artist with a strong belief in their artistic abilities, despite the inherent rejection cycle of a career in the theatre industry. As such, a strong sense of self-efficacy is helpful to anyone, including recent theatre arts graduates who may face multiple challenges during the post-college transition.

Cognitive dissonance theory. When pre-graduate expectations do not align with actual post-college experiences, individuals may experience cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is a psychological term that is defined as "two items of information that psychologically do not fit together" (Festinger, 1957, p. 93). Festinger (1957) proposed a theory that "if a person knows various things that are not psychologically consistent with one another, he will, in a variety of ways, try to make them more consistent" (p. 93). This psychological dissonance occurs when "an individual simultaneously holds two cognitions (ideas, beliefs, opinions) which are psychologically inconsistent" (Aronson, 1968, p. 2). In a study on 184 medical students' expectations and actual experiences in their post-graduate clinical programs, they found that for recent

graduates “where differences between students’ expectations and experiences are significant, students may experience cognitive dissonance” (Scott et al., 2014, p. 41).

Ruble (1994) developed a phase model of transition and motivation. Ruble’s (1994) study on cognitive and motivational consequences during transitions found that “during times of major reorganization, disruption and discontinuity may occur, often affecting the personal and interpersonal adjustment of the individuals involved” (p. 163). The transition from school to work may be experienced as a significant period of disruption. If post-college life is different than what they thought it would be, recent baccalaureates may experience conflicting emotions. Negative associations to transitional experiences can lead to a “level of uncertainty and associated processes, loss of confidence and control” (Ruble, 1994, p. 179). Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) in their work on transition and cognitive dissonance found that if different values are discovered within a personal relationship that “this view of partner dissimilarities emphasizes the potential for cognitive dissonance, with individuals feeling that they be wrong in their beliefs or that something is amiss in their partner” (p. 129). A similar state of incongruence between expectations and actual experiences in relation to the post-college transition can lead to cognitive disruption between the artist and their relationship between self-identity and their career as an artist. For theatre artists seeking work that is scarce in a highly competitive field, individuals who identify strongly with a self-concept as an “artist” in creative endeavors may experience higher cognitive dissonance, especially if during their college years they were highly engaged creatively in their academic environment with regular performance opportunities and have set expectations of having a similar artistic lifestyle beyond insular ivory tower walls.

Self-discrepancy theory. Self-Discrepancy Theory was constructed to distinguish different kinds of discomfort and related negative emotions in relation to a person's self-belief during a period of psychological disparity (Higgins & Hoffman, 1987). Higgins and Hoffman re-analyzed four studies related to psychological discomfort in order to compare different kinds of intra- and interpersonal perceived discomfort during a time of perceived dissonance. In addition to cognitive dissonance, personal dissatisfaction can occur when a person's self-concept does not align with the ideal self, which is attributed to self-discrepancy theory which "postulates that we are motivated to reach a condition where our self-concept matches our personally relevant self-guides" (Higgins & Hoffman, 1987, p. 321).

Self-discrepancy occurs when an individual's basic self-concept does not align with the ideal version of self that they aspire to be and can lead to an identity crisis. Anxiety, disappointment and low-self-esteem are some of the negative psychological outcomes that can occur when a person does not achieve their ideal self or the aspirations they hoped to fulfill (Higgins & Hoffman, 1987; Strauman, 1989). Performing artists who self-identify as creative individuals may feel disappointed when their career expectations as an artist do not align with their actual life experiences. A typical example would be the frustrated actor living in New York City who waits tables as they "wait" to be discovered on stage. This perceived discrepancy may both stimulate a desire to work toward individual artistic goals, but also may lead to a sense of dejection and frustration with not being able to align the actual self with the ideal self. The resulting lack of self-fulfillment can bring on feelings of depression and inadequacy which can be attributed to this state of personal self-discrepancy (Higgins & Hoffman, 1987; Strauman, 1989).

Developmental Theory

In this section on human development theory and young adults, I explore Erickson's Life Span Development Theory and Arnett's Theory of Emerging Adulthood. In addition to these human development theories with a focus on young adults, I also explore the purported common characteristics shared by the "millennial generation," which is the generation related to the time and place of this research topic on the transition to post-college life of recent theatre arts baccalaureate graduates. A greater understanding of the developmental aspects of traditional college-aged young adults may be helpful in identifying the developmental aspects shared by the core population of this study, and how these key characteristics may influence the post-college transition process.

Human development theory and young adults. Life is experienced through a series of developmental stages from infancy through old age. These stages explore the growth and change that occurs through various transitions experienced by individuals during different periods in their lives. Human development theory studies a person's development from birth through death and is based on the major developmental stages throughout the lifespan (Baltes, 1978). Though there are several developmental stages that align with youth and young adults, such as traditional college-aged students, a specific examination of the psychosocial models of human development of Erickson (1963, 1968, 1980), as well as Arnett (1998, 2000, 2001) can be considered to most closely align with the developmental stages of students completing their college years and embarking on the post-college years immediately after graduation.

Erickson's life span development. Erickson (1963, 1968) studied individual human growth and defined eight stages of psychosocial development throughout the life span. Erickson's eight stages include: Stage 1: oral sensory stage between 0-2 years; Stage 2: muscular-anal stage between 2-4 years; Stage 3: locomotor-genital stage between 4-5 years; Stage 4: latency stage between 5-12 years; Stage 5: adolescence stage between 13-19 years; Stage 6: young adulthood stage between 20-39 years; Stage 7: middle adulthood stage between 40-64 years, and Stage 8: late adulthood stage from 65 until death. Though Erickson studied human growth from birth through old age, Erickson determined that the majority of life stages occur from infancy through the stage he identified as "young adulthood," which occurs during a person's twenties.

Erickson (1963, 1968, 1980) studied the relationship between an individual's internal psychological makeup and external social circumstances that interplay during a lifespan and help to forge a person's identity. This psychosocial construct plays out through intrapersonal conflict resolution (or lack of resolution) that impacts an individual's identity development. Erickson further identified that the primary area of conflict that occurs during the traditional college years center on identity versus confusion, and intimacy versus isolation. These stages occur when an individual perceives internal or external conflict as a crisis. How the individual responds to this internal conflict is what Erickson called an "identity crisis." For recent theatre arts graduates, an identity crisis may be a significant component for those individuals that identify as an "artist," especially if anticipated expectations and actual experiences collide during the transition out of college and impact their self-perception as theatre artists.

Though Erickson's eight stages cover the entire lifespan, the stage that traditionally intersects with recent college graduates is the period that Erickson termed "young adulthood" between the ages of 20 and 39. Stage 6 of Erickson's eight stages is when adolescents move into emerging adulthood. When Erickson defined this stage, it was during the 1950s which had a more traditional trajectory, and where young adults moved earlier toward responsibilities which often included marriage and children, along with establishing a long-term career path. Nowadays, that period is often forestalled during a time of exploration that is causing a delay or new paradigm of what constitutes a less linear trajectory toward adulthood and is explored more fully in Arnett's emerging adulthood theory.

Emerging adulthood. The theory of emerging adulthood is applicable to research on the transition to post-graduate life, as it points out the challenges faced during this liminal state experienced by young adults. Arnett's (1998, 2000) research is on the human development phase he labeled as "emerging adulthood," which he described as the period of time between the late teens to the mid-twenties that occurs after adolescence and before the onset of traditional components of adulthood, such as when career, marriage, and children are underway. The lifespan development theory of emerging adulthood is relevant to a study on traditional-aged college students as it explores the experiences of young adults through their early twenties. Arnett (2000) described emerging adulthood as "a time of life when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course" (p. 469).

Arnett (2001) compared three groups which included 171 adolescents (age 13-19), 179 emerging adults (age 20-29), and 165 young-to-midlife adults (age 30-55) in order to determine the identifying markers of the transition to adulthood. Across all three groups, he found that the establishment of personal beliefs and values, taking personal responsibility for one's own actions, financial independence, and an equal relationship with their parents were the defining identifiers of adulthood. Emerging adulthood (which Arnett identifies as the ages between 18 and 25) is a time of significant ambiguity (Arnett, 2000, 2001). Many of life's big questions appear at this time and coincide with the traditional college and post-college years, causing some young adults to experience a heightened anticipation of change at this critical juncture. Arnett (2001) found that "because adolescents and emerging adults have just experienced or are just about to experience transitions such as becoming financially independent, these transitions may appear more momentous as transitions to adulthood at younger ages than they appear from the perspective of young-to middle adulthood" (p. 135).

Research on emerging adulthood explores several key areas related to the transition between adolescence and adulthood, and the myriad of challenges this population encounters, including identity formation, relationships, school, and work-related transitions. Arnett (2004) compiled research on his theory of emerging adulthood and discussed his findings, which he based on several years of interviewing young adults during his research in the early 1990s. He found that "emerging adulthood is the age of possibilities, when many different futures remain open, and when little about a person's direction in life has been decided for certain" (p. 16). Of particular importance to this research study is that emerging adulthood provides insight to a time period where

individuals have the opportunity to explore different options in their lives, such as when emerging theatre artists move from a more controlled educational theatre environment to the new-found freedom of a professional theatre environment. During this time, young artists may seek out new connections to other working artists, form connections with local theatre companies, and try on different theatre “hats” in the theatre industry as they explore other jobs in their field of interest. Several studies on emerging adulthood have found this period to be one of confusion, questioning, and seeking (Arnett, 1998, 2001, 2004; Arnett & Fishel, 2014; Arum & Roksa, 2014a; Baxter-Magolda, 2002). One study that explored purpose and identity in relation to well-being in 850 emerging adults noted that “exploring facets of one’s identity or purpose can involve turmoil and difficulties that are exacerbated without a solid foundation or commitment” (Sumner, Burrow, & Hill, 2015, p. 52). Arnett (2001) noted that emerging adulthood as a period of “in-between” as young adults explore new pathways from school to work and life beyond the classroom.

Arnett (2004) identified five stages of emerging adulthood: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, transition, and a time of possibilities. Because all these stages often overlap, emerging adulthood may be a particularly impactful transitional period for young adults, including recent college graduates, who are transitioning from one stage to another in their lives, and often struggling with multiple challenges and emotions during this period (Arnett, 1998, 2001, 2004). The focus of Arnett's research in relation to a time of transition is particularly useful to research on the transition to post-college life. Arnett (2004) found that "in emerging adulthood the anxieties of adolescence diminish, but instability replaces them as a new source of

disruption" (p. 11). The ambiguity of this period in their lives impacts many new college graduates as they depart college and face an uncertain future. As young adults, this population is "in transition, having moved out of one stage, but not yet having entered the next" (Arnett, 1998, p. 313).

Arnett (2000) studied how emerging adults define adulthood and found that it is not necessarily traditional external milestones that mark the change to adulthood, but rather more ambiguous markers housed in individualistic ideation such as identity and perception of adulthood. However, emerging adulthood is not just defined by major transitions, but also by often the smaller day-to-day decisions made on the path to adulthood. Emerging adults, including theatre arts graduates, face many of the challenges associated with major life transitions, including career, relationships, and financial challenges. Artists deal with similar challenges, such as relocating to a region that aligns with a career in the theatre industry and learning how to manage a budget with inconsistent theatre job opportunities. Though many of the characteristics of emerging adulthood align with the most recent generation of young adults, there are specific aspects that further define and help us understand the nature of the current group of emerging adults and will be explored in the next section on the "millennial generation."

The millennial generation. It is important to understand the millennial generation in the context of this study's participants and the transition to post-college life. How this generation is perceived by others and how they perceive themselves is helpful when considering the choices, decisions, and attitudes toward the current technological and media-oriented society in which we currently live. College graduates may face difficult

challenges in the transition to post-college life, and the most recent generation makes choices that veer from a traditional track, either from necessity or choice. Arum and Roksa (2014a), who studied the multiple challenges among 1,000 recent college graduates in the transition to life after college, found that “social, economic, and cultural changes in society have led in recent decades to increasing number of individuals, including college graduates, not making traditional adult transitions either in their twenties or beyond” (p. 15). These choices may be directly related to being a member of the most recent generation of emerging adults in the 2000s – the “millennial generation.”

The Millennial Generation (those individuals born between 1980 and 1999) share as a group some common characteristics. Several studies examined hundreds of millennials and their purported characteristics in relation to work and personal attributes which have revealed common shared aspects of this generation (Balda & Mora, 2011; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Seppanen & Gualtieri, 2012). Overall, descriptors of this group include optimistic, multitaskers, sheltered, ambitious, technologically savvy, over self-confident, self-absorbed, and entitled. The millennial generation is considered to be a fairly sheltered and privileged generation relative to their socio-economic status, and “many millennials have grown up with paternal support and encouragement and have experienced relatively comfortable lifestyles” (Seppanen & Gualtieri, p. 5).

During their education years, millennials generally prefer structured environments, working in groups, and look for frequent feedback and recognition (Seppanen & Gualtieri, 2012). Millennials also expect a great deal out of their education experience due to the high cost of a college education and associated student loan debt upon graduation (Seppanen & Gualtieri). With many parents who routinely give praise

and encouragement to their offspring, millennials “have been told they can do anything they want to do and be anything they want to be” (Seppanen & Gualtieri, p. 16). For these young adults, years of built up expectations could lead to feelings of ambiguity or even disappointment when things turn out differently than expected during the transition to post-college life. This last point may be particularly relevant to this study on the transition experiences of recent theatre arts majors when expectations about an idealized lifestyle as an artist often do not pan out as hoped for these college graduates.

Regarding their career trajectory, many millennials are entrepreneurial in nature and want to pursue careers that give them flexibility and work-life balance (Balda & Mora, 2011; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Seppanen & Gualtieri, 2012). What millennials often desire in the workplace is basically a continuation of feedback that they had from parental support, as well as the educational system: seeking immediate feedback, clear guidelines, and working in groups. If millennials feel that they are not getting what they need in the workplace, they tend to be considered a “flight-risk” in leaving employment for a better position (Seppanen & Gualtieri). The entrepreneurial nature of millennials fits well with pursuing a career in the arts, since much of the work is freelance in nature (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015; Lena & Lindemann, 2014; Lingo & Tepper, 2013). However, along with the freelance life style, achieving a balanced life is often one of the major challenges that emerging theatre artists encounter in a world of erratic schedules, unstable theatre work, and financial challenges.

Beyond these characteristics, millennials also tend to have challenges with “soft-skills” in communication and developing work relationships. Though many actors are eloquent speakers, as per their job description, networking can be a difficult, but

necessary skill in the theatre industry. Developing these professional relationships can take a great deal of time and effort to achieve in their theatre careers. In regard to work and life, generally millennials like adventure and a glamorous lifestyle (Seppanen & Gualtieri, 2012). The allure of “big lights, bit city” is often one of the main attractions for those pursuing a career in the theatre industry. The millennial generation also desires “happiness” as their ultimate objective and seek fun and enjoyment as one of their aims in life (Seppanen & Gualtieri). The millennial generation is also defined by being impatient in seeking what they want out of life. Millennials “identify their passion and determine the most expedient path forward, rather than having others set a path for them” (Seppanen & Gualtieri, p. 4). These characteristics align closely with an “artistic” temperament and may play a significant role in identity development for these emerging adults.

Identity theory and formation. The concept of identity formation in relation to student development and emerging adulthood is important when understanding the critical role it plays in transition, including the transition to post-college life. Identity formation, along with changing roles, is commonly experienced during the late teens and early twenties, when adolescents are transitioning to adulthood. During a personal transition, individuals forge new identities in relation to changing roles and experiences (Goodman et al., 2006). Research on identity as it relates to lifespan development incorporates the work of psychosocial theorists (Erickson, 1963, 1968, 1980; Josselson, 1987, 1996; Marcia, 1966, 1980). Marcia studied identity formation in relation to identity crisis and level of identity commitment in men, and Josselson continued Marcia’s work studying identity formation in women. These pioneers in the field of identity

development examined how identity is shaped during a period of change, especially in relation to the concept of “crisis” and “commitment” – when a person commits to a new identity during a time of significant change (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). A “crisis” could be defined in the context of this study as experiencing the challenges that may be encountered during the transition to life after college for recent graduates and informs the literature survey of this study on identity and transition to post-college life. In the context of this study, an individual may consider an unexpected transition a “crisis,” as when expectations are not congruent with experiences, depending on the individual and the situation. When a college graduate with a degree in theatre arts does not find steady work in the theatre industry during their post-college years, he or she may or may not consider it a crisis of identity as an artist. This developmental stage in the lifespan incorporates traditionally-aged college students who graduate and move on to life after college and is relevant to the literature review of this study.

Marcia’s identity crisis and commitment. Marcia (1966, 1980) continued to expand on the work of Erickson’s identity development by studying traditional-aged college students through the lens of crisis and commitment and explored how it translated to identity formation. In relation to this study, a crisis as part of the post-college transition may include how an individual navigates discrepancies with expected career, housing, and financial aspects of their lives, but the actual results are not the way they expected in terms of work, living situation, and unexpected cost-of-living expenses.

Marcia (1966, 1980) identified four areas of identity formation in men: diffusion (neither crisis nor commitment), foreclosure (commitment in the absence of crisis), moratorium (in exploration or crisis), and achievement (option exploration that resolves

in commitment). An example of the post-college transition is when a graduate's expectations is met in the foreclosure state, such as when they achieve a career of choice based on academic major and college expectations (e.g., a theatre arts graduate gets regular, well-paying acting jobs with prestigious theatre companies). A graduate who pursues expectations, such as pursuing a job for financial gain over personal fulfillment may be in a state of foreclosure (e.g., an individual goes into career law rather than pursue a career as an actor). A graduate who is undecided on a career path or unable to realize an expectation related to career choice may be in moratorium (e.g., an actor who is unable to get cast in a production for months at a time). Finally, a graduate who is experiencing identity diffusion may not be pursuing a specific career choice at all and choosing to avoid a commitment (e.g., a theatre arts graduate who does not audition or apply for any theatre jobs after college and works part-time in retail).

Though graduates face some or all of these stages in various pursuits after college, this study on post-college expectations versus actual experiences may center on a state of moratorium, such as when a theatre arts graduate encounters unexpected obstacles in their pathway toward a career in the arts. Marcia (1966, 1980) noted that when in identity crisis or moratorium, individuals appear to be in a state of vacillation and indecision, which can manifest itself in a state of anxiety. When experiencing the stage of moratorium after college graduation, recent graduates may take time off to reflect on their life direction.

Many students take what in Europe is called a "gap year" between graduation from college and work in the field they trained for. They may work at a less-demanding job, travel, or do some combination of the two. The concept of a gap year provides for social recognition of this neutral zone moratorium. . . during this period a person is betwixt and between, having left old roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions but not yet in a new life with new roles, relationships,

routines, and assumptions. In one way it is like being in a rudderless boat (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 51-52).

Josselson's identity formation in women. Josselson (1987) continued the work of Marcia (1966, 1980) and focused on females and how their pathways to identity formation explain how women resolve or fail in their attempt to create an identity or remain in crisis. Josselson defined identity as “a stable, consistent, and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world” (p. 10). Josselson (1996) identified four pathways to identity commitment: Pathmakers (identity achievement), Guardians (identity achievement), Searchers (moratorium), and Drifters (identity diffusion). “Guardians” have committed to an identity without any crisis. “Pathmakers” experience crisis, but emerge with an identity commitment in the process. “Searchers” have experienced or continue to live through a time of crisis, but have not yet made any commitment in respect to identity. Finally, “Drifters” have neither explored nor experienced either crisis or identity commitment. All four of these pathways can be present in the transition to life after college, but if a recent graduate encounters discrepancy between their pre-graduate expectations and post-college experiences, they may enter a period of “searching” to make sense of who they will become when experiencing the “crisis” of transitioning to a new life after college. A period of exploring their identity may occur if the transition is compounded by perceived barriers to intended outcomes formed during the college years. However, artists can also remain tightly committed to their identity as artists despite encountering challenges that could cause disruption to their identity, based on how strongly they feel about who they are and what they are meant to pursue as their “calling” (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012).

Artist identity. The transitional period after graduation is a time when young adults seek to explore their options to find the best fit for themselves both personally and professionally. Arum and Roksa (2011) studied almost 1,000 undergraduates in their exploration of the “failings” of undergraduate education in college student learning and outcomes. Arum and Roksa (2014a) continued to follow the same cohort of students through their post-college transition to investigate the challenges of recent graduates and found that “this period of individual exploration and experimentation can last well beyond college as young adults attempt to ‘find themselves’” (p. 17). Part of the developmental process of young adults is the continued struggle to find their identity (Arnett, 1998, 2000; Josselson, 1987, 1996; Marcia, 1966, 1980). This may be especially true in relation to those individuals who define themselves as “artists,” as how they see themselves in relation to their work and personal identity are closely intertwined with their life path.

“Artistic Identity” is different from “Artist Identity.” Artistic Identity is related to the artist’s final product, where the artistic creation reflects the personal values and social constructs of the artist, such as feminism, oppression, and race, and flows deliberately into the work itself (Beech, Gilmore, Hibbert, & Ybema, 2016; Lingo & Tepper, 2013). “Artist Identity” is related to the individual and personal self-identity – often in the context of occupational identity. Lena and Lindemann (2014) examined over 11,000 responses of artists who either self-identified their profession as artist or non-artist. Lena and Lindemann found that there are many differences in how artists self-identify, but emerged with this definition of artist, “The title of “artist” is given to workers who see themselves, and are seen by others, as producers of artistic objects and ideas” (p. 72).

For some artists, the desire to produce art could almost be considered a “calling” where the need to create is a driving force within the individual’s personal nature. Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2012) did a longitudinal study of 450 amateur musicians and why they pursued a career as a musician despite alternative career advice for more practical career paths. They found that despite challenges and hardships, “the deep fulfillment that comes from engaging in a calling domain might compensate for the less enjoyable aspects of sustaining a career in that domain” (p. 275). This construct of personal identity as an artist and as a professional “calling” is helpful to understand the post-college transition of theatre arts majors who pursue a career in the arts despite the inherent challenges of a highly competitive and challenging industry.

Many individuals who define themselves as artists do not work in creative or artistic jobs and much of their income is derived from jobs outside of artistic endeavors (Lena & Lindemann, 2014). Bennett (2009) surveyed the identity and professional development of 239 musicians and dance artists in relation to building a sustainable career in the performing arts. Because the career of an artist is often considered a freelance occupation based on when work becomes available, self-identifying as an artist is often dependent on how an artist relates to the concept of a career in the arts, and “for performing arts students this will mean the adoption of a broad identity within which success is redefined not as a performance career, but as a sustainable career” (Bennett, 2009, p. 326). In addition, studies on goals and occupational motivation of recent university graduates found that perceived external pressure in the form of family, friends, and society may lead to a lower sense of well-being post-college (Haase, Heckhausen, & Silbereisen, 2012; Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2013). This lack of satisfaction due to

external forces may collide with an internal desire for preferred occupational goals, which may be particularly challenging if an individual feels compelled to pursue a "calling" and where alternative options are not part of the career-path equation (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012; Duffy & Dik, 2012).

Artistic identity is closely aligned to the career experience for graduates who self-identify as artists. Bennett and Bridgstock (2015) studied the career projections of 58 music and dance undergraduates and followed up with five of them four years later to explore the expectations versus realities of their careers as performing artists. In exploring the contrasting student expectations and realities of pursuing a career in the arts, Bennett and Bridgstock found that “performing arts graduates are likely to experience inward transformation in personal and career identity as they start to experience the world of work” (p. 265). Though “fame and fortune” is commonly attributed to pursuing a career with so many inherent limitations, artistic career expectations are often closely aligned with the intrinsic values of creative expression and personal fulfillment (Bennett, 2009; Bennett & Bridgstock).

Transition Theory

Theoretical perspective. Schlossberg’s (1984) Transition Theory was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study, as it is the theoretical structure that most closely aligns with individual milestone transitions in a person’s life, including the transition out of college and into the next stage of life. Transition theory articulates the stages aligned with the primary aspect of the post-college transition process that is examined in this study: perceived discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations versus actual post-college experiences. In addition, the transition theoretical framework addresses the

coping mechanisms employed by recent college graduates to manage encountered disruptions when navigating the post-college landscape.

A review of the literature revealed very little research studies on the post-college transition. However, there were a few studies that addressed different aspects of senior year experience in preparation for the transition to life after college, as well as the post-college transition experiences of recent graduates. The idea for this study originated with one of the few dissertations to examine the post-college transition experiences of recent baccalaureates (Fox, 2011). Fox researched the post-college transition experience through interviews with 13 recent graduates among multiple majors from a large Mid-Atlantic research institution and developed a grounded theory on types of graduates that go through the post-college transition process. Fox conducted her study and developed her grounded theory within the framework of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984). As part of her recommendations for future research, Fox noted that in her findings, one of the emerging themes that surfaced during her study was that participants noted several instances of perceived discrepancies between expectations formed in college and the actual post-college experiences of recent graduates. Little research has been conducted on the topic of post-college transition in general, and little to no research related to the perceived discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations and post-college experiences of recent college graduates – and no research on this topic in relation to theatre arts majors. Based on my interest in Schlossberg's work, which closely aligns with the challenges associated with the transition out of college and the limited number of theoretical options that seemed appropriate for this study, transition theory appeared to be the best fit for this research topic and associated research questions.

Schlossberg's transition theory. During the 1980s, Nancy Schlossberg developed a framework for counseling adults in transition to help practitioners understand and assist individuals cope with major and minor transitional life experiences (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Schlossberg defined transition as “any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles” (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 43). Schlossberg's Transition Theory examines how an individual responds to transition in his or her life, based on environmental and individual characteristics, as well as the coping mechanisms that an individual uses to navigate the transition process. The three major components of Schlossberg's Transition Theory include, (a) identifying the type of transition (e.g., personal or career; expected or unexpected) and where the individual is positioned within the transition (e.g., new or ongoing transition), (b) identifying what coping resources are currently available to deal with the transition, and (c) how to strengthen coping resources and form new strategies to deal with the transition (Goodman et al.).

Transition Theory has been aligned with research in psychology, sociology, and education on adult transitions related to life events such as marriage, divorce, retirement, job changes, and other expected and unexpected personal, relationship, and work transitions. Transition theory can also be applied to the transitions of college students as they move into, move through, and move out of the college years when there is often a great deal of uncertainty during these developmental years. Schlossberg noted that transition is a time of confusion where “we are not what we were, nor are we clear about who we should be and what is expected of us” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 167). In relation

to this study, recent graduates face many of these same challenges in the transition to life after college.

The primary focus of this study is on the transition to post-college life for theatre arts graduates, which will be examined through the theoretical lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984). The core concept of this theory is that adults in transition may experience significant personal changes during both anticipated and non-anticipated life events. In their work related to counseling adults, Goodman et al. (2006) specifically focused on transition as it pertains to the self during a time of change, when individuals "moving through a transition requires letting go of aspects of the self, letting go of former roles, and learning new roles" (p. 23). These changes may also apply to recent college graduates as they move toward the next steps on the path to adulthood.

For this study, transition theory is particularly relevant to recent graduates as they transition from college to post-college life, which is often a period of great ambiguity. Transition is a time of personal transformation – when both expected and unexpected changes occur. When aligning Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984) with the transition out of college, a recent baccalaureate graduate may expect to pursue employment related to his or her college major (anticipated event) upon graduation, but instead may encounter unexpected barriers toward his or her career goals, and find the resulting experience is an entirely different outcome than expected (unanticipated event).

For graduating seniors, the transition out of college is an expected outcome, or an anticipated transition in their lives. Recent graduates emerge from college with expectations of how they anticipate their lives will unfold. However, the experiences that recent graduates experience in the early years after graduation may not be congruent with

the expectations that they formed in college. Unmet expectations are “non-event” transitions. Schlossberg defined a non-event transition as an expected event which does not occur for an individual (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006). Examples of general non-event transitions are when an expected marriage, child, or career expectation does not happen as anticipated. In relation to theatre arts majors, which are the research subjects for this study, a non-event could be when an actor expects to “make it big” in the entertainment industry, but this expectation does not materialize. Anderson et al. noted that though there is opportunity for growth and development during a time of transition, a positive outcome is not guaranteed. Based on individual characteristics and level of preparation, many college graduates may fall into the situation where expectations do not align with actual experiences in the transition to life after college.

There are three main stages of the transition process: (a) moving out, (b) moving through, and (c) moving in (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg et al., 1995). In applying these transitional phases to the post-college experiences, the “moving out” phase is graduating from college. The post-college transition is mostly aligned with the “moving through” phase whereby things are unpredictable and an individual must transform and “reinvent the future” (Goodman et al., p. 168). This period of uncertainty is often the case when a recent graduate faces unexpected obstacles to their life plans and must adjust accordingly to a new paradigm that they were unprepared for. “Moving in often requires learning new skills and almost always requires learning new ways of using old skills” (Goodman et al., p. 167). The point where a new graduate starts to adopt new roles and move beyond the challenges of the transition is most closely aligned with the “moving in” phase in the next step on their path to adulthood. During the

transition process, both the “moving in” and the “moving out” phases share similar perceptions of ending one thing before beginning another. In addition, both the “moving in” and “moving out” phases also share various emotions such as grief, loss, and ambivalence, which sit alongside such emotions as excitement and anticipation for what the future holds (Goodman et al.). Since the transition to life after college is often a time of ambiguity as new roles are explored, graduates can feel overwhelmed when the change involves moving out of one stage of life (college years) and moving into the next stage of life (post-college years), especially when what is expected does not match the graduate’s actual experience. Goodman et al. noted that change is a time that involves not just the individual, but also the interaction between a person and their environment, and the relationship between the two – which also relies on various coping mechanisms during a time of transition.

The first coping mechanism that Schlossberg (Goodman et al., 2006) identified in the transition phase is "situation." Situation defines the circumstances that triggered the event, the good or bad timing of the event, how much control the individual feels about the event, role changes that may be involved, the duration of the transition, if other stress is present, and how long in duration is the transition expected to be (Goodman et al.; Schlossberg, 1984). Embarking upon life after college, recent graduates may identify these and other variables that denote this period as a situation where significant change is occurring in their lives, including concerns over career, finances, purpose, and social support, among others. Recent graduates' perception regarding the circumstances, timing, control, role changes, duration, and associated stress levels may all impact how post-college life is perceived.

Schlossberg (Goodman et al., 2006, Schlossberg, 1984) identified the second coping resource as "self," which includes the demographic and personal characteristics that affect individual perceptions. An individual's background influences their worldview and how they perceive and deal with life challenges. As such, "a transition is not so much a matter of change as of the individual's own perception of the change" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 40). Schlossberg noted that a person's psychological resources, including coping ability, outlook, self-efficacy, and resiliency are all relevant to how an individual approaches transition (Goodman et al.; Anderson et al.). This concept of "self" may apply to emerging graduates who are embarking on the transition out of college based on how they approach challenges, as well as their level of perceived self-efficacy, attitude, coping strategies, identity, skills, and flexibility associated with this life transition. These characteristics will help identify the origin of "self" as recent college graduates begin the transition out of college and into the next stage of their lives.

The third coping resource in Schlossberg's theory of transition is "support" (Anderson et al., 2012; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1984). For recent graduates, social support is critical as they leave their collegiate community and all the interpersonal relationships that have supported them during their undergraduate years. Support refers to external and internal coping strategies that help individuals deal with life transitions. Support is considered both at the personal and institutional level (Evans et al., 2010). At the personal level, family, friends, faculty, advisors, mentors, and peers are members of a student's personal support base (Evans et al.). At the institutional level, university-wide, college-wide, and department specific programs and resources such as student support services, alumni offices,

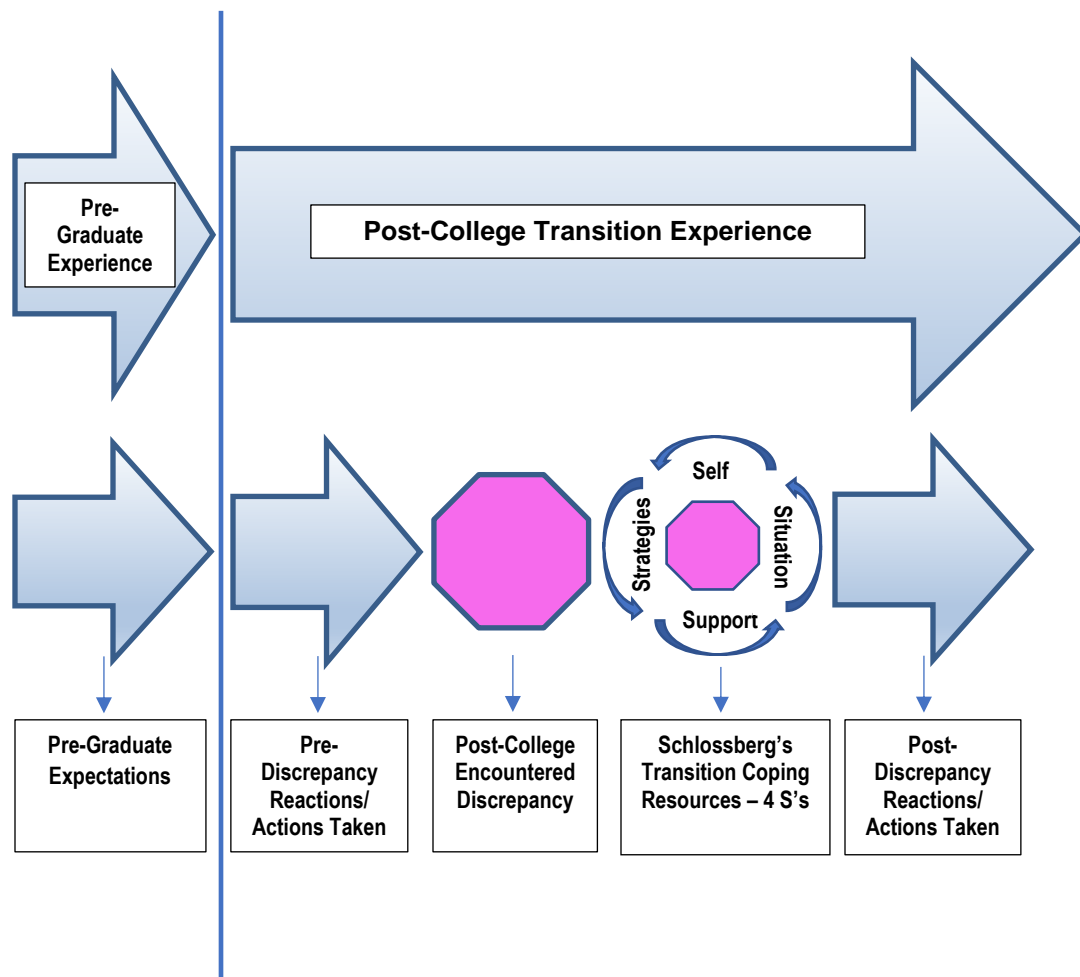
advisers, and faculty are considered institutional support for the senior in transition (Evans et al.; Gardner, 1999; Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998). New support systems need to be developed when students emerge from their alma mater in order to effectively navigate post-college life.

“Strategies” is the fourth identified resource for coping with a transition (Anderson et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2010; Goodman et al., 2006). Strategies are essentially those mechanisms that help students manage problems and stress associated with the transition (Evans et al.). Strategies for recent college graduates may include both internal and external coping strategies, including seeking out information, utilizing resources, identifying goals, seeking out mentors, developing greater self-efficacy, and other psychosocial effects of this exploratory process.

The four variables of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (situation, self, support, strategies) closely align with recent college graduates' psychosocial challenges during the transition out of college and the start of their next life stage. Transition theory is relevant to this study as it helps to lay the foundation of understanding the college to post-college transitional experience of recent theatre arts graduates as they face the next stage in their lives as emerging theatre artists.

Conceptual framework. The conceptual framework underlying this study is based on Schlossberg's (1984) transition model. The conceptual model, shown in Figure 1, builds on Schlossberg's theory on the transition process in relation to the post-college transition process for recent college graduates. The conceptual model depicts phases of the transition process.

Figure 1: Conceptual model of transition for recent college graduates based on Schlossberg's Transition Model.



During the transition process, college seniors are in a liminal state as they prepare for the ambiguity of the transition out of college. During their undergraduate years, undergraduates are forming their pre-conceived ideas of what they foresee will be their future after they graduate. These “pre-graduate expectations” are formed upon the experiences they have as undergraduate students within their institution, and particularly in relation to their career plans, based on their major undergraduate program experiences. The development of these expectations is a “pre-transition” period or the overall transition process from school to work.

Once students graduate, they embark upon the post-college transition process. As students merge into this transitional period, it is possible that some of the plans or goals that these students formed in college (or even earlier) do not turn out the way they expected after college. When this disruption occurs, recent graduates encounter perceived discrepancies between what they thought would happen and what actually transpired after graduation. For example, in this study on theatre arts majors, a recent graduate who planned to pursue an acting career after college finds that they are not able to get a role in a professional production as planned. They may be auditioning for many theaters, but not getting the roles they auditioned for, and thus may be encountering a lack of congruence between what they expected in terms of their career and what actually happened.

The model attempts to explain how this process unfolds. If an individual encounters a discrepancy between their expectations and actual experiences, they react to the situation by taking stock of their environment and associated resources. Schlossberg (1984) noted that the individual in transition has four coping resources that they draw upon when going through a time of disruption (situation, self, support, and strategies).

The individual assesses their resources to attempt to deal with the encountered discrepancy. For example, based on the actor scenario above, the individual may look at their situation to determine what happened. The individual looks at what triggered the event (e.g., not getting cast in a show), the timing of the event (e.g., they did not get cast in a role they were sure they were “perfect” for). The individual also may examine how much control they have of the event. Since getting cast in a show is dependent on multiple, and often outside factors, in the theatre industry (e.g., physical match for the role, or high competition with many people auditioning for the same role, etc.), they may attribute external factors as to why they did not get cast as expected. The individual may also look at the duration of the transition (e.g., they repeatedly audition for roles, and repeatedly do not get cast in a theater production). This process continues through all four coping resources to examine how each individual will manage the discrepancy. After this process, the individual responds to their new paradigm through psychologically reacting to the situation, and/or taking specific action based on the situation. The response process is examined in the findings of this study in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a qualitative design. A qualitative design was chosen because it is well suited for an under-researched topic and where the intent of the study is to explore the experiences of the study participants (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An extensive exploration of the literature revealed that very little research had been conducted on the transition to post-college life, particularly in relation to the pre-graduate expectations versus the actual post-college experiences of theatre arts majors. Since there was limited knowledge on this topic and the intention of this research was to explore how theatre arts majors make meaning of their experiences after college, a qualitative approach was determined to be appropriate for this study, where “the overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23).

In the early planning stages for this study, a grounded-theory strategy of inquiry was considered as a feasible approach for the study’s topic. However, after the data were collected and analyzed, it was determined that a generic approach was the best strategy for this study. The primary reason for choosing a basic qualitative approach over a grounded theory approach was that in the final analysis, this study did not generate a theory that “might help explain practice or provide a framework for further research” (Creswell, 2013, p. 83). Instead, a proposed model that adds another dimension to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1984) is presented in Chapter Five to help explain the study participants’ psychological process regarding their transition experience in relation to perceived discrepancy between pre-formed expectations and resulting experiences.

Basic qualitative inquiry goes by several names including “generic” and “interpretative” (Merriam, 2009), though the term “basic” will be primarily used in this study. Merriam described the basic qualitative approach as an appropriate approach to research when “. . . qualitative researchers conducting a basic qualitative study would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23). Basic qualitative research typically references other common qualitative approaches, but does not rely on a specific method (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). In comparison, a basic qualitative approach differs from other types of qualitative approaches that have an additional underlying dimension: the phenomenological approach seeks to understand an underlying phenomenon; ethnography seeks to understand the intersection between individuals and their unique societal culture; the narrative approach seeks to understand meaning in individual stories; the grounded-theory approach seeks to build a theory to explain a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Merriam). A study using one of these methodological approaches may be a better fit for future research related to this topic, but a basic approach made sense for beginning the exploration process in an area where insufficient research has been conducted.

This qualitative study assumed a particular epistemological paradigm in order to obtain subjective perspective on the views and experiences of participants.

With the epistemological assumption, conducting a qualitative study means that researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied. Therefore, subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views. This is how knowledge is known – through the subjective experiences of people (Creswell, 2013, p. 20).

Epistemology is the philosophical assumption implied for practice in this qualitative study, as its characteristics include personal quotes and close observations of the study participants, which I observed during the interview process. In this study, I attempted to engage closely with the study participants through in-depth interviews that allowed me to engage in the immediacy of their personal reflections on their post-college experiences.

The worldview perspective used as the foundation for this study is social constructivism, which relies on the complexity of the participants' viewpoints (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Creswell 2013). Constructivism was appropriate for this basic qualitative study as it “underlies” a generic approach to research when trying to understand meaning of study participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since this study examined the complex and varied levels of participants' viewpoints regarding their post-college transition experiences, social constructivism was indicated when the goal of the research was to “rely as much as possible on the participants' view of the situation” (Creswell, 2013, p. 25).

Limited research exists on the post-college transition process, and even less on the specific transition experiences of theater arts graduates. This study's intention was to understand this experience more fully, specifically in regard to any perceived discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations and post-college experiences of recent theatre arts graduates. Basic qualitative inquiry involves analyzing recurring patterns and themes that help support the researcher's understanding, specific experiences of research subjects, and is also commonly used in research related to education (Merriam, 2009). Through a basic qualitative study, I was able to explore the specific experiences among this particular population that has had little-to-no investigation on this topic. Since “all

qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. . . to uncover and interpret these meanings” (Merriam, p. 25), a basic qualitative inquiry was an appropriate approach for a study that sought an initial exploration on the topic of the post-college transition experience of theatre arts majors.

Researcher Perspective

My interest in the transition out of college emerged from my work as an academic advisor at a large, public research university. The researcher’s personal background, objectives and worldview shape the theoretical position of the researcher and the direction taken for choosing a specific approach (Caelli et al., 2003). The individual aspects of my life that helped to shape this study were formed during my years as an academic department advisor for a liberal arts program at a large university. During my six-year tenure in this position, I worked closely with hundreds of college students from their first year through their senior year – and sometimes beyond, as many of my former students continued to stay in touch after graduation. Though I was interested in all stages of college student development, I was particularly drawn to the challenges facing college seniors. My work with seniors first pointed me to the need to consider issues related to post-college life, as students preparing to graduate often had concerns about the transition to life after college.

College seniors preparing to graduate often cited concerns over their future living situation (e.g., living at home with parents or relocation), financial challenges (e.g., cost-of-living, paying back student loans), and if they would have to “settle” for a job or career in an area that was not related to their major or personally fulfilling. In addition, I

would often hear from alumni who had encountered unexpected challenges with their intended career trajectory and how these challenges impacted their lives on a multitude of levels. I decided to explore the literature in relation to the transition out of college, and through my research on this topic the idea emerged to explore students' expectations established in college and the actual lived experiences they encountered after graduation. My interest in the perceived discrepancies between expectations and experiences during the transition to life after college resulted in the topic of this study.

I narrowed the focus of my study to the post-college experiences of theater majors, as that aligns with my own college background and professional interest in the theatre industry. My academic background includes a bachelor's degree in theater, and my own post-college trajectory – and that of many of my college peers – encompassed many of the challenges identified by the participants in this study. I self-identify as an “artist,” making creative works for public consumption. I spent a majority of my high school and college years performing in several theatrical productions and studied and performed music for many years. However, my trajectory after college was very different than what I expected it would be like after college. Instead of continuing to pursue a life as an actor, I worked in the business and educational sectors for several years as an administrative assistant before I decided to continue my education with a master's degree in college student development and a doctorate degree in higher education. Expectations of what my life would be and what actually transpired were certainly quite different than I expected after college graduation.

For many years I chose not to pursue a life in the arts after college due to limited opportunities and a desire for a steady income, predictable schedule, and security.

However, I have recently returned to working in the theatre industry. My interest in theatre was reawakened when my husband wrote a musical, which premiered at a festival in New York City, and where we temporarily relocated to produce the show several years ago. During that time, I worked closely with many young theatre arts graduates and had several discussions with these young artists about the challenges of living and working as a performing artist in New York City. Upon our return home, my husband and I founded our own small theatre company in Minneapolis, and continue to author, develop, and produce plays and musical theatre productions for Twin Cities and New York audiences. For the past several years, I have worked with actors, designers, and other theatre professionals on a regular basis, many of whom graduated with a degree in theatre arts. Due to this ongoing interaction with recent performing arts graduates, I continued to learn about various challenges during the transitional period post-college, particularly in relation to theatre majors.

Through my own academic, personal, and professional engagement with the theatre community regionally and nationally, I continue to learn about the challenges of being a theatre artist during the early years after college. My research has found limited information regarding the experiences of this particular population and I chose to design a study that examines this experience in greater detail, especially as there is so little research available on this topic in higher education.

Human Subjects Approval

The University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) approved this study in January 2017. The parameters of the study met the exempt status requirements listed under the IRB website located at

www.irb.umn.edu, and per the requirements for this research study, I completed the form entitled *Surveys/Interviews, Standard Education Tests & Observations of Public Behavior – Exempt Category 2*. In addition, I completed an online, human-subjects training course that was required by IRB in January 2017 prior to starting data collection.

Due to the nature of the study and the proposed interview questions, it was not necessary to obtain a signed consent form from the study participants. However, I did provide a one-page Consent and Information Form (Appendix A) that listed the interview procedure protocol, information on how the research would be conducted, participant confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of the study. I carefully went over the form with each participant and asked if they had any questions prior to proceeding with their interview.

Research Subjects

Participant criteria. The participants for this study were recent theatre arts graduates who were residing and generally working within the Twin Cities metropolitan area at the time of their interview. The geographical location was selected due to the Twin Cities being a major theatrical hub in the United States, with more theater seats per capita than any other region outside of New York City (Creative Minnesota, 2017). Within greater Minnesota, there are over 250 professional and community theatre companies state-wide, and over 75 professional theaters within the Twin Cities metropolitan area, ranging from small theater companies to large regional theaters (Creative Minnesota, 2017). In addition, the Twin Cities is where I, the study researcher, reside and run a small theater company, providing geographical convenience, industry

resources for locating subjects, and access to recent college graduates who are pursuing a career in the theater.

The study participants were recent baccalaureate graduates with a theater arts major from a four-year public or private college or university within the United States. For purposes of this study, “recent baccalaureate graduates” is defined as theatre arts baccalaureate students who have been out of college between 1.5 and 3.5 years. Interviews for this study were conducted during January and February 2017 and the study participants graduated between December 2012 and December 2015. A delimiting period of 1.5 to 3.5 years post-college was the interval studied, allowing a significant timeframe for study participants to have adequately explored the post-college transition process and provide rich data for the study.

Participant demographics. Though race and gender were not specifically identified as selective parameters for this study, they each played a role in defining the characteristics of the study during the selection process. Since there is a much higher ratio of female to males in theatre arts majors, more women than men were anticipated to apply for the interview process. According to an analysis of the top five degree granting institutions for baccalaureates in drama/theatre arts in the United States, 62.5% of baccalaureate degrees were awarded to individuals who identify as women (NCES, 2016). However surprisingly, mostly males came forward as potential participants in the initial recruitment portion of the study. After consulting with my advisor, it was determined to run a revised recruitment advertisement that specifically requested the need for female participants, in addition to male participants. The final gender mix of the 20

participants represented a balanced representation of theatre arts majors with 12 women and eight men.

Additionally, since participating in the theatre arts may be considered a “white privilege” activity, more Caucasians than persons of color participated in the study. In theatre arts programs, Caucasians significantly outnumber minority populations with degrees granted by a ratio of approximately 8 to 1 (NCES, 2016b). The study had a total of 20 participants. Eighteen of the participants identified as Caucasian, one participant identified as mixed-race, and one participant identified as African American. These study demographics generally align with gender and race representations among theatre arts majors in the United States. In addition, all participants were assumed to be in their mid-twenties, having fairly recently graduated from college as traditional students, but no official ages were requested during the recruitment process.

Participant recruitment. For the purposes of recruitment for this study, personal networking was not my primary approach as I wanted to distance myself from the creative professionals that I had encountered in the theatre industry up to the time of the participant interviews, as well as former advisees in my work as a college advisor. Ethical considerations also precluded working with artists I am connected to personally or professionally through my work as a theatre producer, director, and theatre company owner, as there is an inherent power structure among stratified roles in the theatre world. Networked interviews can pose certain challenges ethically and politically (e.g., power differential), as well as personally (e.g., intimate revelations) that may skew the data objectives of the study (Josselson, 2013). Individuals I may have worked with previously may have altered their responses to meet perceived expectations on either side. In

addition, the power differential inherent in the interviewer/interviewee positionality with the interview process could have resulted in skewed data where subjects “. . .express that they believe the interviewer authority wants to hear” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 38). As a result, I chose purposeful sampling as the strategy for selecting this study’s participants.

Purposeful sampling is a form of participant selection that is based on specifically identifying individuals that meet the criteria of the shared phenomenon (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). In addition, “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). As such, participants are chosen from a homogenous group of individuals that share a common experience (Charmaz; Creswell).

The intended number of subjects for this study was between 15 and 20 participants, with a final count of 20 individuals who participated in this study. A total of 20 interviews was selected based on qualitative research criteria that allows for enough breadth in interviews that extract rich depth in data collection “until a point of saturation, where further interviews yield little new knowledge (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 140). The selection criteria for this study was based on a typical sample type for qualitative research, which provided representative characteristic aspects of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2009). For this study on the post-college transition of theatre arts majors, the participants were required to fulfill the following criteria:

1. A baccalaureate recipient who graduated between 1.5 and 3.5 years at the time of their interview, and verified by providing a copy of their college transcript

2. Graduated from a baccalaureate theater arts major program at a public or private college or university
3. Have actively pursued a career in the theatre industry
4. Not be personally acquainted with the researcher

This last point addressed the necessity to maintain professional neutrality within the local theatre community and avoid influencing participants' responses due to prior or potential future collaborations.

Since finding alumni who fit the criteria for a study is more challenging once they have left their alma mater, I used methods that allowed me to access college graduates through social media platforms. When trying to locate appropriate individuals for study interviews, recruitment is generally done through either personal networking or posting an advertisement for volunteers, usually through the Internet (Josselson, 2013, p. 15). In order to locate recent theatre arts graduates as potential study participants, I sought individuals through online resources that cater to the Twin Cities theatre community. There are several Facebook groups that reach over 8,000 online members, and a regional theater arts online magazine which theoretically reaches over 16,000 members and is accessed over 50,000 times each month by active working artists in the local theatre community.

To find participants for the study, I sought candidates by placing advertisements through three public Facebook groups for Twin Cities theatre artists, and also through Minnesota Playlist, the primary online magazine resource that serves the Twin Cities theatre community and where auditions, jobs for theatre artists, and advertisements for theatre opportunities are listed. These social media platforms were used to access

potential study participants and to immediately connect me, as the study researcher, with hundreds of theatre arts individuals throughout the Minneapolis/St.Paul metropolitan area and surrounding communities.

On each of the Facebook groups, I posted a brief message about the study and a link to the full advertisement that I placed with the online theater magazine – Minnesota Playlist (Appendix B). The ad listed a short introduction to the study, participant qualifications, and my university email address to contact me if interested. I stated in the recruitment advertisement that a \$30 Amazon gift certificate would be provided at the conclusion of a successful interview as an additional incentive in my recruiting endeavors for the study. I wanted to offer some kind of reimbursement to thank each participant that interviewed for the study, as well as increase the likelihood of attracting potential study participants fairly quickly in order to complete the data collection for the study in the spring of 2017. Finally, offering a form of compensation was congruent with my personal and professional value of compensating theatre professionals for their time and effort, especially since compensation in the field of theatre is frequently and significantly underpaid.

I responded to each individual who contacted me with their interest to participate in the study with three additional emails. The first email requested information that determined an individual's eligibility for the study. If an individual fulfilled the eligibility requirements, I sent them a second email communication that provided additional detailed information about the intent of the study, and confidentiality procedures for the participants (Appendix C). The third email confirmed the individual's participation in the study and the meeting time and location of the interview at a local public library.

As mentioned earlier, I had scouted out several public libraries within the metropolitan area which had free meeting rooms for rental. After determining schedule and location availability with potential candidates, I then reserved a public meeting room for a ninety-minute timeframe and then finalized the meeting with the interviewee. Each communication with a potential study participant often involved several email communications to finalize the interview meeting. I also sent a reminder email prior to the interview date to each participant. Though most participants followed through and attended their scheduled interview, there were a few instances of individuals withdrawing based on schedule conflicts (after several times rearranging to meet with them), and one “no-show,” whom I sent another email to reschedule the interview, but received no response.

In my prospectus for this dissertation, I had a back-up plan to locate potential study candidates if the social media approach did not supply enough candidates. This back-up plan included contacting appropriate theatre departments within the Twin Cities and outstate Minnesota to reach out to arts faculty and advisors who have worked with theatre arts majors and might have connected me with potential alumni for this study. The other alternate strategy was to seek out alumni organizations of local Minnesota colleges and universities in order to obtain a database listing of contact information of theatre arts alumni. However, the social media approach worked very well, and within a three-week period, about 40 potential candidates had contacted me as interested parties. I took candidates on a first-come basis if they qualified, but several individuals who first contacted me were not eligible due to not meeting study qualifications (e.g., not

graduating within the specific timeframe). Also, other participants continued to contact me even after the 20 participant slots were filled.

Procedure

Pilot testing. Prior to starting the interview process, I conducted two pilot tests of the interview questions in January 2017. Pilot testing provided the opportunity to test clarity and integrity of the questions, assess researcher bias, and refine research protocol and procedures (Creswell, 2013). The intention of the pilot testing was to determine that if any of the questions did not meet the robustness of the interview process, they would be replaced with more salient questions that extracted rich data for the purposes of the proposed study. Testing of the pilot questions were conducted with two theatre arts baccalaureates that I had worked with in years past. These two individuals generally met the criteria listed for the proposed study, but the participants in the pilot study were slightly outside the intended post-graduation timeframe in order to allow easier access for pilot testing purposes. For example, both participants were approximately four or five years out of college, but still provided a reasonably thorough examination of the robustness of the intended interview questions, such as basic understanding of the questions and if the questions were presented in a logical order for the interview process. I asked the participants after their interviews if any of the questions needed to be changed, but each of the two volunteers stated that they had understood the questions and had no recommendations for changes to make to the interview questions. I also did not see any obvious changes that needed to be made to the interview questions after conducting the pilot tests, but still slightly adjusted the interview questions to the final set of question presented in Appendix D.

Interview protocol. Social constructivism, sometimes referred to as “interpretivism,” is a primary characteristic of all qualitative research, wherein “individuals construct reality in interaction with their social world” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). In order to understand the experiences of the study participants, I aligned basic qualitative research with social constructivism as the foundation of the interview portion of this study. A semi-structured interview process was used for this study as it is a preferred method of collecting data for social constructivist framework and homogenous sample base (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). A semi-structured interview was also indicated for this basic qualitative study as it allowed for flexibility in extracting rich data through individual stories during the interview process. The semi-structured interview format “allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, p. 90). Semi-structured questions allow flexibility, yet also elicit specific data from the study participants through questions designed to explore the various issues surrounding the study’s topic (Creswell; Merriam). Since little research has been done on the topic of the transition out of college, specifically in relation to theater arts baccalaureate graduates, I used some flexibility during the interview process to adjust the questions in a fluid manner to extract rich data for the study’s analysis.

The following protocol for interviewing subjects for this research study was adapted from Creswell (2013) and included the following steps:

Determine type of interview. Open-ended questions were used during interviews to yield both depth and breadth in extracting data from the participants in order to yield descriptive and detailed data (Merriam, 2009). The one-on-one interviews were

conducted in person, as “the live interview situation, with the interview’s voice and facial and bodily expressions accompanying the statements, provides a richness to subjects’ meanings. . .” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 154). Creswell (2013) noted that “for one-on-one interviewing, the researcher needs individuals who are not hesitant to speak and share ideas” (p. 164). Fortunately, theatre arts majors are usually quite articulate and forthcoming, so the live interview process was a particularly good fit for this study’s population.

Use adequate recording procedure. During the interview, I used a new MP3 recording device that was properly tested beforehand, as well as a backup recorder in order to make sure that the interview was properly recorded with sufficient backup. The microphones were tested ahead of time to make sure that all vocal patterns would be picked up and no ambient noise distorted the recording. I informed the participants that they would be recorded during the interview process and provided a copy of a Consent and Information Sheet (Appendix A) that outlined the process and confidentiality procedures before the start of recording the interview. I informed each participant that all recordings would be kept in the strictest confidence and used solely for the purpose of transcription, and then destroyed after the completion of the study. I also informed the participants that pseudonyms would be used in place of their real names to protect the identity of the participants.

Use an interview guide. I created a guide with 13 open-ended questions to refer to during the course of the interview (Appendix D). Through the interview process, I did not find it necessary to employ notetaking, as I wanted to maintain complete focus on the interviewee to help limit distractions or interruptions during the interview process. I feel

that my professional experience as a college advisor conversing at length with hundreds of students over the years well prepared me for conducting an effective interview with each study participant.

Determine place for conducting interview. I conducted the interviews at various local public libraries in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, which provide free meeting areas to the public. The meeting rooms were glass enclosed that looked onto the public rooms in the library, but still provided quiet privacy during the interview process. Library meeting rooms were reserved based on participant's location and scheduling needs. The choice of a public library was intended to provide a comfortable and safe environment for conducting the interview, yet allowed enough privacy to invite participants to disclose their experiences in a confidential manner. The use of meeting rooms at local public libraries worked well for both the interviewees and researcher and provided a comfortable environment that generated rich data for the study.

Obtain consent from interview to participate in study. Though a signed consent form was not required based on the nature of the interview questions, I did review the protocol process with each participant prior to starting the interview. This disclosure included the confidentiality procedures used in regard to subject anonymity, which included assigning pseudonyms for the participant's name, identifying transcripts with codes, and detailing the secure storage of all electronic and hard copies of the participant's transcript and identifying related data. I also asked each participant if they had any objection to being recorded, and also informed them that the recorded interview would also be securely stored during the duration of research process, and then destroyed at the conclusion of the study. I asked each participant if they had any questions before

starting the interview. I also reiterated that the interview process was completely voluntary and gave them free control to choose not to proceed with the interview if they had any reservations. None of the 20 participants had any reservations to proceed or declined to do the interview, and all interviews were completed in their entirety.

Use good interview procedures. I stayed as closely as possible to the interview guide sheet in referencing the interview questions, and moved the interview along as needed to allow adequate coverage for each question. The time frame allotted for each interview was between 45 and 75 minutes, with an average interview time of 50 minutes. This amount of time allowed enough time to ask pre-determined questions, as well as sub-questions and follow-up questions during the interview process. I kept the interview running on time, so as not to go over the allotted time frame by staying on task and steering the interview toward discussion that supported the study's objectives.

Interview Questions

Many of the interview questions were based on aspects of Schlossberg's Transition Model (1984), which were discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Schlossberg's transition theory is constructed on counseling procedures that address adults in transition. Aspects of the transition model were used as guides for developing the interview questions for this study. Thirteen primary questions were formulated on the coping resources developed by Schlossberg in response to how she determined that individuals deal with transition. As noted earlier, these four coping resources are: (a) situation, (b) support, (c) strategies, and (d) self. In addition, the interview questions were framed around the type of transition that the study participants were experiencing. For this study on perceived discrepancy between pre-graduate expectations and actual post-college

experiences, it was determined that the type of transition experience associated with discrepancy was a “non-event” transition – an event which did not materialize as expected. A list of the interview questions is listed in Appendix D.

The questions were designed to elicit information regarding the participant’s undergraduate experience in order to have them refer back to the post-college preparation and experiences they had as undergraduates, where much of their pre-graduate expectations were formed in relation to their lives as emerging theatre artists. The set of questions was also designed to examine the actual experiences they had after college as theatre artists, which explored the resulting post-college experiences that they had after college, and to explore any perceived discrepancies that the participants encountered between their pre-graduate expectations and post-college experiences. In short, participants were asked “if anything turned out differently than expected.” Finally, a few questions revolved around artist identity. These questions were created based on the fact that the study participants were unique in that they were recent theatre arts graduates, and how encountering discrepancy may have impacted their self-perception of artist identity. As such, participants were asked about their sense of artist identity at the time of college graduation, and then later in the interview process, asked about their sense of artist identity currently, based on their post-college transition experiences.

For all interviews, Schlossberg’s four coping resources were thought to emerge during the interview process in relation to the participants support systems, the specific situations they encountered during their transition experiences, the strategies they did or did not use to cope with the transition process, and finally their sense of self and identity in relation to the transition process. All the interview questions are aligned with the

Conceptual Framework based on Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984) that is presented at the end of Chapter Two.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed using a basic transcribing software program. I chose to do my own transcription, as I felt it would be the best way for me to engage deeply with the subjects and their responses by carefully listening as many times as needed to determine what was being relayed by the participants during the interview process. Since I was obviously in the room with the interviewee, it was also easy for me to decipher what was being said if there were any unintelligible audio portions of the transcript on the recorded audio.

After the transcripts were completed for the 20 interviews, I went back to read all the transcripts to get an overall sense of the information and reflect on the meaning of the information presented (Creswell, 2013). I developed a data analysis plan that would be appropriate for the basic qualitative approach I used for this study. Qualitative data analysis allows the researcher to use inductive reasoning to make sense of the collected data in order to answer the proposed research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Even though I used a basic research strategy, I used a grounded theory approach to code and analyze the data as it provided greater rigor to the study analysis.

For the initial part of the study's analysis, I used a constant comparative approach, which is a basic approach to data analysis first proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In this basic form of data analysis, "the process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories is called the constant comparative method of data analysis" (Creswell, 2013, p. 86). Constant comparative analysis allows the

researcher to contrast and compare the data on a continuing basis as the data emerges throughout the study, thus allowing for recurring patterns and themes to surface from the data collected (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once certain patterns and themes repetitively emerge during the process of constant comparative analysis, “the overall interpretation will be the researcher’s understanding of the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam & Tisdell, p. 25). Since the constant comparative method aligns well with basic qualitative research, I chose this form of data analysis to begin the analysis for this study.

The data from this study was analyzed through three phases of coding often used in grounded-theory research: open, axial, and selective coding of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach aligned well with generic qualitative research, as grounded theory provides an approach to coding data that extracts the desired descriptive data sought for this basic research study on the experiences of recent college graduates.

I started with an open coding process, which is descriptive in nature, followed by axial coding (sometime called analytical coding), which placed the data into groups that was further interpreted for possible meaning (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding develops information categories extracted from the data, and axial coding interconnects these categories in meaningful ways (Corbin & Strauss). Open coding looks for recurring patterns of words or ideas that were repeatedly discussed by the study participants.

After having read all the transcripts through a few times, I proceeded with the first step in the analysis process with open coding by circling significant and repetitive phrases or concepts that emerged within each transcript. I used several different colors to

highlight words and phrases into general categories. For example, anything that related to a participant's pre-graduate expectations were highlighted in yellow, and anything related to discrepancy was highlighted in green. I developed an Excel document that listed these highlighted words and phrases that could be rearranged in multiple ways to view the data. During this process, I was looking for patterns to emerge. Saldana (2016) noted that, "a pattern is repetitive, regular, or consistent occurrences of action/data that appear more than twice" (p. 5).

The second phase of the data analysis involved axial coding. Through this process identifiable themes started to emerge by carefully examining repetitive phrases and ideas. During this process, I cross-referenced the open-coded hard copies of the transcripts with the electronic version of the transcripts. Corbin and Strauss (2008) determined that through the open coding process, researchers reveal concepts that develop into categories. I highlighted the electronic version of the transcripts based on emerging themes and grouped them into several categories. Once these patterns emerged and were coded into information categories, the data was further explored to identify categories of data that influenced, related to, or explained the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013).

After analyzing the data, a model of the process emerged wherein the researcher generated "statements that interrelate the categories in the coding paradigm" (Creswell 2013, p. 196). Thus, with this third step of selective coding, a "story" of the connected data emerged from the data regarding the transition experiences of recent college graduates. Themes that were similar in nature were first grouped generally, and then refined down to four primary themes and multiple subthemes. For example, "artist identity" was first grouped as an entire theme, then broken down into two separate time

frames: at time of college graduation and at the time of the interview. Then each of these two categories were further refined into three or four subcategories that defined the significant aspects of how study participants made meaning out of their identity as artists during the transition to post-college life. These primary and secondary themes were revealed through this three-step process of coding and analyzing the data and is presented in detail in Chapter Four.

The quotes that I selected for Chapter Four were chosen based on how reflective the comment was in answer to the question, and also if the comment provided insight related to the topic being explored. The subjects for this study were theatre arts graduates, who overall are a verbal and engaging population that did not shy away from sharing their ideas and thoughts with me as the interviewer of this study. As evidenced by some of the comments in the following section, the participants had a wide range of perspectives to share regarding their experiences as emerging theatre artists. Since many of the participants were actors, it is not unusual to expect that they wanted to share their feelings, as well as their experiences. As with any group, there was a wide-range of personalities represented across participants, which are reflected in the varied comments presented in the following results chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis collected through 20 individual interviews conducted over four weeks between January 2017 and February 2017. The results are presented in the following order. First, in order to situate each participant's experience within their unique context, each participant is briefly described, but without such specific details to easily identify a participant. Second, four identified primary themes and the subsequent secondary themes of each primary theme explore the transition to life after college for these participants based on their pre-graduate expectations, post-college experiences, perceived discrepancies between their expectations and actual experiences, and finally, how participants viewed their identity as artists within the context of the post-college transition experience as recent theatre arts baccalaureates. The results that emerged from coding and analysis of the data are presented in order from highest to lowest percentages of participant responses within the varying number of sub-themes for each of the four primary themes.

The Participants

Twenty individuals participated in this qualitative research study: Twelve (12) self-identifying females and eight (8) self-identifying males. At the time of the interviews, which were conducted in January 2017 and February 2017, each participant had been out of college between 1.5 years and 3.5 years and had graduated between May 2013 and June 2015. Graduation dates for the 20 study participants were evenly distributed in thirds with six (6) participants who graduated in 2013, seven (7) participants who graduated in 2014, and seven (7) participants who graduated in 2015. Among the 20 study participants, three (3) participants graduated with a Bachelor of Fine

Arts degree (BFA) and seventeen (17) of the participants graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree (BA) from a theatre arts major program within the United States between May 2013 and June 2015. The individuals interviewed for this study were intending to or actively pursuing a career in theatre arts at the time of graduation and at the time of their interview. The size of the higher educational institutions the participants attended are identified below with a range of small (fewer than 3,000 students), medium (between 3,000 and 15,000 students), and large (over 15,000 students).

Below is a brief description of the participants in order to provide context to their comments later in this chapter. Some specific, identifying information of interviewees was eliminated if necessary to ensure participant anonymity. The labels of “study participant,” “participant,” and “interviewees” were used interchangeably as identifiers of those individuals who participated in this study. In the context of this paper, the term “actor” is a generalized term used for all genders in the acting profession, but the gender-specific term “actress” (female-identified) is also used within this paper. Participants are presented below chronologically based on graduation date; at the time of the interview, all were residing and working in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area.

DERRICK (Director) is a self-identifying Caucasian male in his mid-twenties. He attended a medium-size, public university in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in May 2013. Derrick identifies as a director, and he is currently working as a stage director, along with a variety of “backstage” theatre industry roles with small to medium professional theatre companies. He supports himself with a full-time day job in the service industry and is interested in pursuing a Master of Fine

Arts degree (MFA) in Directing. Derrick graduated approximately 3.5 years prior to the time of his interview for this study.

GRANT (Actor) is a self-identifying Caucasian male in his mid-twenties. Grant completed his first two years at a community college and then transferred to a large, public university in the Midwest. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in May 2013. Grant identifies as an actor. Grant started his theatre career after college with a touring theatre company and travelled with the company for six months. Since then, he has worked fairly steadily with small and large professional theatre companies in the Twin Cities, and also works multiple day jobs in the service industry. Grant recently applied to graduate school to get his Master of Fine Arts degree (MFA) in acting. He graduated approximately 3.5 years prior to the time of his interview for this study.

SARAH (Director) is a self-identifying Caucasian female in her mid-twenties. She attended a large, public university in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in May 2013. Sarah identifies as a director and has worked multiple theatre gigs as an assistant director, along with small stage director jobs with professional theatre companies. Sarah supports herself with multiple days jobs in education and theater administration, and at the time of the interview was in the process of applying to several graduate school theatre programs. Sarah graduated approximately 3.5 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

TERESA (Actor) is a self-identifying Caucasian female in her mid-twenties. She attended a small, private institution in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theatre in May 2013. Teresa identifies as an actor and started her professional acting career with a cruise ship tour that lasted for several months, but she is

now consistently working with small, professional theatre companies in the Twin Cities. Teresa supports herself with her own business teaching music and working other small music gigs. At the time of the interview, Teresa was engaged to be married and had graduated approximately 3.5 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

BRETT (Actor, Playwright) is a self-identifying Caucasian male in his mid-twenties. He attended a medium-size, private institution in the Midwest near Chicago and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in June 2013. His theatre interests are in playwriting and dramaturgy, along with acting. He initially tried to get acting jobs when he first moved to the Twin Cities, but when he was unable to get any acting roles, he then pursued a master's degree in education and supported himself with a full-time day job as a K-12 teacher. Though he is not currently looking for acting roles as he completes his master's degree, he is open to working in the theatre industry in the future. Brett graduated approximately 3.5 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

KYLE (Stage Manager, Director, Actor) is a self-identifying Caucasian male in his mid-twenties. He attended a large, public university in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in December 2013. Kyle's theatre interests are in stage management, directing and acting. Kyle worked multiple part-time regular jobs for about a year and a half after college graduation and lived at home in order to save money. He eventually moved to the Twin Cities and is trying to find a full-time day job while working part-time jobs in the service industry and theatre administration. He had not been able to find any directing jobs at the time of the interview and was still pursuing potential directing leads at the time of the interview. Kyle graduated approximately 3 years prior to the time of his interview for this study.

EVAN (Actor) is a self-identifying Caucasian male in his mid-twenties. He attended a large, public university in the Southeast and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theatre in May 2014. Evan identifies as an actor and came to Minnesota on a post-college apprenticeship with one of the large theatre companies in Minnesota. Evan has always wanted to pursue acting since high school and has been working steadily as an actor with professional theatre companies since college graduation. However, he is considering a different career path in business that would provide greater financial stability, and currently has a full-time day job in the business industry. Evan would like to have his own theatre company in the future. He graduated approximately 2.5 years prior to the time of his interview for this study.

HEATHER (Stage Manager) is a self-identifying Caucasian female in her mid-twenties. She attended a small, private liberal arts college in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in May 2014. She identifies as a stage manager and primarily makes her living by working stage-management jobs. Heather lived in New York City for a year right after college and worked on off-Broadway shows, but then she came back to Minneapolis to gain more experience working as a stage manager for large theater companies. Heather is planning on relocating to New York City in the near future to pursue her dream of working on Broadway as a stage manager. Heather graduated approximately 2.5 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

LUKE (Actor) is a self-identifying Caucasian male in his mid-twenties. He attended a medium-size, private university in the Southeast and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in May 2014. Luke identifies as an actor and came to Minneapolis on a theatre apprenticeship right after college and has worked continuously

as an actor with large theatre companies since relocating to the Twin Cities. Luke had the experience of auditioning for a Broadway show during his college years. He also works a full-time job in the business sector, along with his many acting roles, and he graduated approximately 2.5 years prior to the time of his interview for this study.

VANESSA (Actor, Stage Manager) is a self-identifying Caucasian female in her mid-twenties. She attended a small, private institution in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in May 2014, where she struggled to get roles in school productions. Vanessa has pursued working as an actor since college graduation, but she has had only one ensemble role in a local community theatre production. At the time of the interview, Vanessa was transitioning to working as a stage manager instead of as an actor. Vanessa married right after college and currently supports herself with a part-time job in the service industry. She graduated approximately 2.5 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

RACHELLE (Actor) is a self-identifying African American female in her mid-twenties. She attended a large, public university in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in May 2014. Rachelle identifies as an actor and supports herself doing corporate temporary jobs during the day, while working professional acting jobs at larger theater companies on a regular basis. Rachelle is interested in pursuing a career in film and television, and she graduated approximately 2.5 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

IVY (Actor) is a self-identifying mixed-race female in her mid-twenties. She attended a small, liberal arts college in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in June 2014. Ivy identifies as an actor, but she found it difficult to

break into the Twin Cities theatre scene and finds it difficult to get roles due to high competition for female acting roles. Ivy worked a few shows the first year out of college, but then went a year without any acting job. Ivy supports herself with a full-time job in the service industry which she enjoys. She is considering moving to Washington D.C. to pursue theatre work close to family and friends, and she graduated approximately 2.5 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

MELISSA (Actor) is a self-identifying Caucasian female in her mid-twenties. She attended a large, public university in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in December 2014. Melissa worked full time while attending college and generally had a negative undergraduate program experience. She identifies as an actor and has had sporadic acting work since college graduation. Melissa has large student loans and credit-card debt, and works multiple part-time jobs seven days a week to meet her basic financial needs. She graduated approximately 2 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

AUSTIN (Actor) is a self-identifying Caucasian male in his mid-twenties. He attended a small, private liberal arts college in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in May 2015. Austin had trouble finding any job right after college, but eventually got a job in fast food service. Austin relocated to the Twin Cities with his girlfriend about a year after graduation. He has a large student loan debt, and financial concerns are a main concern. Austin identifies as an actor, and at the time of the interview, had not yet found an acting job in the Twin Cities. Austin supports himself with a full-time job in customer service and has increased the frequency of auditioning

for roles in order to find acting work. He graduated approximately 1.5 years prior to the time of his interview for this study.

FAYE (Costume Designer) is a self-identifying Caucasian female in her mid-twenties. She attended a medium-size, public university in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theatre in May 2015. Faye identifies as a costume designer and has worked consistently since college graduation doing small sewing jobs for various small and professional theatre companies. Faye aspires to be a resident costume designer for a large theater. Faye mostly supports herself with her costume design work and sewing jobs, but also works seasonal jobs to supplement her income. Faye graduated approximately 1.5 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

JENA (Stage Manager) is a self-identifying Caucasian female in her mid-twenties. She attended a small, private college in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in May 2015. Jena identifies as a stage manager and came to the Twin Cities on an internship with a large theatre company. Jena has had consistent work as a stage manager with medium and large theatre companies in the Twin Cities and she has found that things turned out even better than expected with her career goals. Jena occasionally supplements her income with part-time jobs in the service industry and she graduated approximately 1.5 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

NAOMI (Actor) is a self-identifying Caucasian female in her mid-twenties. She attended a small, private liberal arts college in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in May 2015. Naomi took off three years prior to starting college to explore her options. Naomi identifies as an actor and has had regular,

paid acting jobs with small theatre companies since college graduation. Naomi is married and works primarily as a teaching artist during the day, along with other part-time jobs in the service industry to supplement her income. Naomi graduated approximately 1.5 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

OSCAR (Actor) is a self-identifying Caucasian male in his mid-twenties. He attended a medium-size, private university in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in May 2015. Oscar identifies as an actor and has had consistent acting jobs in the Twin Cities since college graduation. He moved to the Twin Cities after college to work in educational theatre as both an actor and administrator, which has been his primary day job and provides the flexibility needed to pursue his acting career. Oscar graduated approximately 1.5 years prior to the time of his interview for this study.

PAIGE (Director) is a self-identifying Caucasian female in her mid-twenties. She attended a small, private institution in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre in May 2015. Paige moved to Minneapolis for an internship with a large theatre company and liked the area so much she decided to move to the Twin Cities permanently after college. Paige identifies as a stage director and has had several internship opportunities on the East Coast and in Minnesota since college graduation. Paige has also had consistent work as an assistant director with several small theatre companies in the Twin Cities and works in theatre education as her day job. Paige is planning on applying to graduate school for directing in the future. She graduated approximately 1.5 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

CAROLYN (Actor) is a self-identifying Caucasian female in her mid-twenties. She attended a small, liberal arts college in the Midwest and graduated with a Bachelor of

Arts degree in Theatre in June 2015. Carolyn identifies as an actor and has worked steadily with small professional theatre companies since college graduation. At the time of her interview, Carolyn had applied to several graduate school programs for acting. She graduated approximately 1.5 years prior to the time of her interview for this study.

Analysis of Findings from Participant Interviews

Themes

Four primary themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data. Theme 1: Pre-Graduate Expectations: Undergraduate Preparedness; Theme 2: Post-College Experiences: Career, Finances and Other Factors; Theme 3: Discrepancies between Pre-Graduate Expectations versus Post-College Experiences; Theme 4: Artist Identity: Then and Now. The first primary theme, Pre-Graduate Expectations: Undergraduate Preparedness, examines the college preparation that study participants received during their college years aligned with the pre-graduate expectations they formed as theatre arts majors. The second primary theme, Post-College Experiences: Career, Finances and Other Factors, explores the daily lives of the study participants while pursuing a career as an emerging theatre artist. The third primary theme, Pre-Graduate Expectations versus Post-College Experiences, explores the perceived discrepancies between what recent theatre arts majors thought would happen and what actually happened during their post-college transition experience. Finally, the fourth primary theme is Artist Identity: Then and Now, which explores study participants' development of their identity formation and self-perception as theatre artists from the time of college graduation up until the time of their interview for this qualitative study on the post-college transition of recent theatre arts majors.

Coding and analysis of the data that emerged across all 20 interviews resulted in a varying number of subthemes, which are listed below each of the four corresponding primary themes. Results are presented in order of frequency of study participants' responses in each thematic section. The percentage of participants whose data contributed to a specific thematic subsection is categorized by the following number of participant responses in each subtheme: "A few" = < 3; "About one-third" = 4-7 participants; "About half" = 8-12 participants; "About two-thirds" = 13-17 participants; and "Almost all" = >18 participants. Selected participant quotes in this chapter are illustrative responses for each thematic section and often are fewer in number than the actual number of participants whose data contributed to a particular thematic category. In addition, specific identifying information was eliminated from participant quotes if necessary to ensure participant anonymity.

First Theme – Pre-Graduate Expectations: Undergraduate Preparedness

An analysis of the undergraduate experience is necessary in order to have a contextual understanding of the academic and developmental experiences of the study participants as theatre arts majors. The theatre major program experiences of the interviewees had a lasting impact beyond their college years and emerged as a significant contributor to the post-college experiences of the of the individuals interviewed for this study.

The coding and analysis of the data collected across 20 individual interviews revealed that Undergraduate Preparedness emerged as one of the four primary themes related to the transition to post-college life for theatre arts majors. During the interview process, each participant was asked to cast their mind back to their experiences related to

their undergraduate theatre arts major program. Each participant was initially asked: “Please tell me about some of the most significant experiences you had in relation to your undergraduate program as a theatre arts major,” followed by, “Tell me about any specific preparation you had as part of your theatre arts major curriculum for your life in theatre after college.” When necessary, additional unscripted questions were posed to the interviewee. From these initial inquiries, the first primary theme emerged from the data: Undergraduate Preparedness. In addition, three subthemes emerged from an analysis of the data related to Theme 1: A) Faculty Impact on Theatre Arts Majors Experiences, B) Post-College Preparation, and C) Bachelor of Arts versus Bachelor of Fine Arts Programs.

The participant responses are organized under “positive contributors” and “negative contributors” to generally categorize the participants’ theatre arts program experiences within varying subcategories of each of the three subthemes that emerged from the data. Subcategories of each subtheme are presented below in order from highest to lowest number of participant responses.

Faculty impact on theatre arts majors’ experiences. Study participants identified a number of factors which had a significant impact on their college development as theatre majors. The first subtheme that emerged in relation to their undergraduate experience was Faculty Impact on Theatre Arts Majors’ Experiences. About two-thirds of the study participants noted that their theatre arts professors impacted their development as emerging theatre artists by the amount and type of faculty-student interactions during their college years and beyond. Approximately half were mostly positive contributions, and another half were mostly negative contributions. Participants

noted how their interactions with faculty members impacted their undergraduate experience as theatre arts majors and are identified under the corresponding subcategories listed below.

Positive contributors. Three subthemes emerged from coding and analysis of the interviews as positive contributors of interviewee experiences with theatre arts faculty within their undergraduate programs: (a) Mentor/Mentee Relationship, (b) Academic and Professional Development Opportunities, and (c) Faculty Professional Training and Industry Experience. Key concepts related to positive faculty impact ranged from finding faculty to be welcoming, helpful, and willing to work with students individually, to more practical assistance with post-college preparedness through academic and professional experiences related to the theatre industry. About half of the participants noted their positive faculty interactions during their undergraduate years and are presented below from highest to lowest frequency of responses. In this section, “mentor” is defined as a theatre arts faculty member who forged a personalized, academic interaction with a student that had a significant impact on the professional development of the interviewee, which here is defined as “mentee.”

Mentor/mentee relationship. About half of the participants noted that they forged a meaningful connection with at least one of their theatre professors during their undergraduate years. Carolyn, who attended a small, private “welcoming” liberal arts school, noted that the professor she met during her sophomore year “was amazing to me as a mentor... I had that one-on-one interaction with my professor where I would, like, hang out in his office all the time, and that was the kind of relationship that we had.” Since Carolyn’s undergraduate program did not have any formal post-college

programming, having an active mentor was very important to her undergraduate development. Carolyn stated: “If I didn’t have that kind of relationship with a professor, then I think I would have been totally lost.”

Rachelle, who is African American, talked about having a person of color as a mentor and how that helped her navigate her undergraduate program: “My mentorship just sort of came out of me taking every class that he offered and going to his office hours. Asking him to help me figure out how to integrate into the theatre community here.”

Ivy spoke about her relationship with her faculty mentor in terms of support during her transition to post-college life and how he was “one of my biggest sources for questions about the theatre world outside of college.” Ivy went on to say that her faculty mentor was consistently available to meet and discuss her future:

He was always willing to sit down and have a cup of coffee with me... and I would tell him, ‘I am terrified of this. I think this might happen afterwards. What do you do in this situation?’ And he always took time to answer my questions.

Evan talked about how a professor that he considered a mentor challenged him to work harder on his college courses as he was not completing the necessary work during one of his undergraduate classes. Evan noted that: “Part of his laying into me, with affection, was that I need to focus on what I am doing right now. And nothing comes later without the work you put in now.” Evan further noted that his work ethic was solidified and continued in his professional development: “Because I admire him so much, I was, like, oh my God, I need to change everything!”

Sometimes a mentor/mentee relationship did not develop until late in a student’s college years. Jena, who wanted to pursue stage management as her primary career focus,

noted that she eventually found a mentor during her undergraduate program, but that it came too late to fully develop:

In my final semester, I was doing an independent study with another professor who had worked as a stage manager all through his college program. So, we were kind of able to talk about that while I did my independent study with him and that kind of thing. So, he started to become more of a mentor, but unfortunately it was a little too late in my program to really develop that relationship.

Melissa, who often felt like an “outsider” in her undergraduate program, talked about how she had a professor who validated her talent as an actor, but it also was not until late in her undergraduate program:

There was one person who saw my strengths and who fostered that, but it wasn't until my senior year, so it was like, ugh! Just awful. And that was a faculty member. However, funny enough, she was very fringe. She completely inspired me and made me feel like I belonged. And then I was done. It was all over... But, I did have that good interaction with a professor my senior year which made me feel like at least I wasn't crazy. Because I was put in a situation where everybody said you're wrong. This is how we do things. Don't you see all these other people succeeding? Why don't you just do it the way they do it? And this one person was like, I hear you, I see you, your talent is valid.

A few participants noted that their relationship with their undergraduate professors extended beyond their undergraduate years and that they continued to have a professional connection with their college mentors after they graduated. Evan noted that he is “still best friends” with his college mentor. Carolyn noted that her relationship with her mentor continued beyond college and that she continues to work with her mentor on various theatre projects as a producer and performer in some of his local plays and productions. Carolyn noted that she and her mentor frequently stay in touch: “I saw him yesterday and he and I are still very much in contact.”

Paige also talked about how her relationship with her professors continued after college and that her connections with them morphed into fellow colleagues:

Even though my professors maybe didn't give me the best resume-builder classes and stuff, but as an artist, they've been so wonderful. They have all become great friends of mine, and I can express my frustrations to them and they can say: 'Yeah, I've been there. But it's good that you have these frustrations. It means you are really intelligent and you know better.' They always seem to have some sort of phenomenal advice to give, as peer artists from peer to peer.

Academic and professional development opportunities. About a third of the study participants noted that theatre faculty members helped them with academic and professional development opportunities that were not specifically part of their undergraduate program requirements. Carolyn's program did not offer dedicated career courses for theatre arts majors. When Carolyn asked for help with writing a resume for the theatre industry, she stated that her mentor took the time to help her personally: "He said to just come to my office and I'll show you what I do. I'll show you some examples and you can write one and I'll give you pointers." Sarah noted that one of her professors helped her find a way to explore a topic that was not offered in her regular program by helping her to create a reading list to study the history of women's roles in theatre: "She and I met one-on-one twice a week in her office, so that was very much a mentor-mentee relationship."

Teresa talked about how her connection with a favorite professor who taught music classes changed the course of her career path:

My teacher had me accompany his lessons with other students and that's what actually drove me to be a teacher... I got to create my own lessons in my head watching him do his lessons and I don't think I would be comfortable teaching without that. I don't even think that was his intention when I was doing it, but he knows now that I teach music and he loves that I'm doing that. But it was an opportunity that went far beyond what either of us expected it to be.

For a few of the participants, having access to working theatre professionals was a highlight of their undergraduate training. Brett talked about how taking classes from one

of the faculty members in his program gave him unique access into the local professional dramaturgy and theatre industry near his college. Brett stated that taking courses and working with this professor helped him to create and develop professional portfolios specifically tailored to his field of interest in dramaturgy. In addition, Brett stated his professor “was a dramaturg around town” with connections to the local theater scene, which eventually led to two internship opportunities for him:

She taught a theatre class that forced us to get into the city more and see shows and interview them and stuff like that... where we got to see behind-the-scenes stuff, staged readings and first productions. So, we got to see some of the behind-the-scenes process and meet the staff and stuff. So, that definitely helped us feel more integrated.

Paige noted that her training as a director was helped by having the opportunity to work with a wide variety of visiting theatre directors: “What turned out to be so great is that I eventually worked with all of the directors and guest directors that we had all of my four years.” Naomi noted that working with theatre professionals was also a key benefit of her undergraduate program:

I would say one of the most valuable things was how many people they brought in. My sophomore year, I believe, they started a workshop program where they would bring in actors, directors, whatever, in for two or three workshops. And the fact that every year there was a guest director. So, I feel like they did a very good job to bring people in and to not just be working with the three professors we had for every single class and every single show... so from the beginning there was this idea that what this program was going to do was connect me with people outside of the program saying, we're not teaching you how to act in the theatre program. We are teaching you how to make connections and how to act in the local theatre industry.

Faculty professional training and industry experience. About a third of the participants discussed how helpful it was to have faculty who were professionally trained artists, and interviewees noted that having professors with prior industry experience was a helpful resource for developing theatre artists. Participants also noted that faculty

members who were also actively working in the theatre profession was a significant plus to their undergraduate training as it provided access to current practices in the industry.

Luke noted that in his program: “Our professors ranged in backgrounds, as far as, like, they had their professorships elsewhere and they performed professionally for so many years. But they all had their PhD or MFA by then, which I think is usual for a program.” For Sarah, having professors that were active in the local theatre scene was an advantage that led to her enrollment in her small, liberal arts college. Sarah wanted to work with a particular director, and when she saw he was teaching at that school, that helped to finalize her decision: “I knew that I wanted to study directing, so I was, like, this has got to be the school if this director guy is big in the department.”

Ivy found that understanding the business side of theatre and learning about it first-hand in the classroom helped to prepare her for life after college as an actor. Ivy talked about having access to a faculty member who had recently worked in New York City as an actor for 30 years prior to becoming a professor in her program:

He very much wanted his students to feel prepared in some way – to get an idea of theater as a business. Because it's all well and good having all the emotional feels, and Stanislavsky method for acting, and how to be a director, but you also have to be able to function as a business commodity or a seller of the business. That was something that I was very grateful for in the end.

Compared to the relative insulation of her college theatre program, Heather talked about how the mentor she cultivated outside of her college program helped her learn about the challenges of professional stage management:

I had, through the work-study program, a phenomenal mentor, who was kind of my reality-check guy through all of this. He made it very clear this is not easy work. It's not an easy journey. It's not an easy life to live doing this in the performing arts. So, as a junior in college, I layered on the reality of what I was doing. Whereas my university really wanted to keep it in their little bubble. But I

started becoming aware of what was going on outside of the walls and in the professional world.

Negative contributors. Three subthemes emerged from coding and analysis of the interviews as negative contributors of participant experiences with Theatre Arts Faculty within their undergraduate programs: (a) Faculty-Student Conflict and Impact on Student Confidence, (b) Resistance to Outside Professional Opportunities, and (c) Lack of Professional Training and Industry Experience in Faculty. Key concepts related to negative faculty impact on theatre arts majors' expectations included conflict over classes, lack of helpful mentoring, and faculty comments or perceptions that negatively impacted a student's self-confidence. About half of the participants noted the challenges they experienced as a theatre arts major and interviewee comments follow in the section below from highest to lowest frequency of responses for each contributing factor.

Faculty-student conflict and impact on students' confidence. About half of the study participants discussed challenging interactions with their theatre arts faculty members. For some participants, the mentor/mentee relationship changed over the course of their undergraduate program from a positive to a challenged relationship. Jena noted that things started out well with one of her professors: "We were really close for a while." However, over time Jena found that the same professor "was a little unpredictable," and that eventually there was a fallout between them over conflict regarding her role as a stage manager for one of the school's productions. Jena stated: "The professor, who had kind of been my mentor, and the director, kind of threw me under the bus a little bit. So, at that point, I was just like, nope. Done with you. Thanks and bye."

Brett talked about a conflict with his professor that stemmed from the perceived critical feedback he gave regarding a college theater festival his professor was producing.

Brett felt that the subsequent fallout between them kept Brett from pursuing the coursework he wanted to take during his undergraduate program and had negative ramifications as a theatre major at his college:

The friction with the professor was a main issue there, and that I didn't really know was there until she called me into her office and told me I wasn't going to be getting into the playwrighting sequence class my senior year. So that was dismaying, because I thought my writing was at a decent level. It still is a little difficult to wrap my mind around. I felt quite peeved, at the very least... I guess I had been a little too critical of her... and she felt that I would bring the class down because I didn't have a positive enough outlook. Which is sometimes a recurring theme in my life. It is kind of weird how things kind of come back to bite me in weird, unexpected ways. So, you wouldn't expect that something like that would play a factor in your future at the school or like taking a class. I wouldn't have expected that. So, it was just a weird experience.

Rachelle did not feel that she got the kind of guidance she was looking for with the mentor that was assigned to her in her undergraduate theatre program:

We would have these one-on-ones with our mentors. And I went to my mentor and I was, like, 'Ultimately my ultimate goal is to do film.' And he was, 'Oh, well you should be at a film school. This is the kind of the wrong school for you.' And I was, like, 'Okay.' And that's the only meeting I ever had with him after that... I just dropped out of that mentorship program, because I was, like, I'm not getting anything from you. I'm not getting anything from these sessions.

For other participants, perceived negative interactions or lack of being one of the “favorites” with theatre professors had a detrimental impact on their self-confidence as aspiring theatre artists. These interviewees noted that they still struggle with negative self-perceptions. Teresa talked about how the professors in her program consistently labelled her as a “non-dancer” and that she still carries the self-perception that she does not have the requisite choreography skills needed for certain acting roles.

I really wanted to pursue dance more, but unfortunately my professors pegged me as a non-dancer – she doesn't want to dance. And, unknowingly, they discouraged me hugely from it. They told me I was not that. And they encouraged hugely in other ways. You are an actress and a singer, but you will be constantly looking for roles where you don't dance. And still to this day, I don't want to take dance

classes, because I have been told I am a non-dancer. I think if my professors had encouraged me in this way, where I could have been... I think that was really disappointing for me, because they unknowingly put up these barriers... and said, you are not a dancer.

Melissa noted that she felt that she was consistently an outsider in her undergraduate program: “There was this group of people who clicked with the professors and they got special treatment... I don't believe that I can turn back to any of my professors as mentors and ask for advice.” Grant observed similar challenges in his college program, but felt he eventually became one of the “favorites” in his program:

I remember when I first got there noticing who the favorites were or who the better actors were, or however you want to think of it. And at first it really bothered me. But then it didn't, because then I became at least a couple of the professors' favorite. So, it's one of those things that it sucks if you are not the recipient. So, there were some directors and teachers who picked favorites.

Vanessa struggled to be cast in her theatre arts program in a main role for a school production, even though she was the only full-time theatre major in her class at a small liberal arts college. Vanessa talked about not getting cast in lead roles and how that impacted her self-confidence:

I have nothing against the background parts, but I think as the years go by in school you want it to be more of a learning environment and a teaching environment. And when a lot of the same people get the same parts it's kind of like, well sure, they've already had these big parts and maybe their audition was better than my audition. But like, this is supposed to be a learning environment, so shouldn't you give someone else a chance to try that part out?... I just always kind of feel like, somehow, I just missed it by just a little bit and it's hard to figure out where's the pinpoint. Like, what was wrong or what could I have done?

Resistance to outside professional opportunities. About a third of the study participants discussed the challenges of taking on theatre projects and internships outside their department's jurisdiction. This was a source of conflict for some interviewees, as they felt it limited their opportunities to engage actively with the professional theatre

community in preparation for a career after college. Sarah described the lack of support for outside opportunities at her private, liberal arts college:

I know that individual professors were incredibly supportive of student work, but the department as a whole was not as supportive, because, you know, they felt it took away from department activities. And I totally blew off my school work to do my own stuff.

Heather was interested in pursuing stage management in college, but she was in a program that did not have specific training in her field of interest. Heather found she had to create opportunities for herself outside her undergraduate theater program: “I myself figured out how to arrange my classes to make that work and how to get credit for doing this.” Heather made her own connections for an internship with a theatre company in Minneapolis, without her department’s support: “I did that all on my own, and then I accepted the internship, and then went to my professors and said: ‘This is what I’m doing; this is how my next semester will look,’ and didn’t give them a choice.” Heather went on to discuss the challenges of trying to get department support for a semester internship located a significant distance from her college:

The professors were very resistant to it, so I really had to put my foot down and say I am doing this, and this is why, and it’s a better opportunity for me than what I would be participating in up at school. But there was a lot of resistance... I think in my particular program the professors feel as though they know how it should be done, so having a student – a 21-year-old – counter them on that and say: ‘You know what? You don’t have the knowledge that I feel I need or the experience, but these people do.’ I entered college knowing what I wanted to do, took advantage of the school’s resources, and reached a point where I felt where I wanted to know more and do more. And I think the professors felt threatened by that and that they didn’t want to look bad and have a student voluntarily take themselves out of their sphere of curriculum.

Sarah also found that her undergraduate program did not encourage internships in the Twin Cities, a significant drive from her college: “They didn’t necessarily encourage

it during the school year, because commuting is not terrible, but it's enough that you are doing it every single day.”

A couple of participants talked about being in an undergraduate program that was resistant to pursuing professional theatre work while still in school. Naomi stated: “I was not able to audition for shows in the Twin Cities theatre community, and that was a killer for me.” Luke talked about the challenge of his professors resisting the idea of his pursuing professional roles while he was still in college:

I did get a little push back from faculty, and I did get some sort of... not resentment, but just unforgiveness if I were to be late with an assignment, or late for something, and theater classes were pretty unforgiving as far as attendance goes. Most other classes offered two absences. I had a theatre class that didn't allow any. And they encourage you not to do that, because it is a different world out there and I understand why you don't want your students to go and audition for things and working professionally, because you want them to hold on to sort of the craft and the art of it before they go into that business side of things. But I will say it did help me, because it helped me get into a real rehearsal room, which is not like college at all.

Lack of professional training and industry experience in faculty. A lack of practical industry experience in the theatre arts faculty came up in about a third of the interviews. Participants discussed how current and professional theatre experience among faculty members translated to better training in theatre arts undergraduate programs. Interviewees commented on the challenges of being adequately prepared for life as an active artist after college without a certain amount of practical knowledge about the current theatre industry. Faye noted this discrepancy:

All of my advisors and mentors were faculty who did not work in the area, so I was being taught by those who were not currently working in the field for which they were training for. So, they had a lot of experience and a lot knowledge, but they were not necessarily aware of the changing times, and how the field has changed over the past 30 years they have been working there.

Jena noted that the faculty in her department did not have a current and practical

knowledge base of the professional theatre scene, as all of the faculty members in her department had “come straight back” to teach at the same college they had received their undergraduate degree after getting their master’s degree at the local state university. Jena stated: “None of them really had the professional experience or the professional contacts... they just had no idea, you know, and they didn't know any resources to point me to or anything like that.” Derrick also noted the same issue with the faculty from his program, situated in a quiet rural area far from any significant metropolitan area: “A lot of them have been here for years. They don't work professionally, and if they do, it’s far, far away.”

A couple of the participants noted that having professors who were actively working in the theatre industry posed a different set of challenges for students. Rachelle noted that in her college program: “A lot of the professors were active members of the theatre community... so you had professors who were putting on shows all over.” Rachelle commented that these professors, who were also working professionals, sometimes had other obligations that competed with mentorship time with their students. Ivy talked about similar, though different limitations of undergraduate professors actively working in the theatre industry:

One of them is an established director, but she has been since the sixties, so you know... she was very creative and a smart director, but there is only so much you can learn from her as a young actor, because I feel like she was a little out of touch, in some ways. And then the other professor, he was busy building his own theatre career. I think he would have done better at a conservatory than a liberal arts college. And so, I think he didn't quite know how to talk to those of us at the college. Good guy, but we couldn't get anything useful out of that, so the classes that were offered were few and far between and not very useful in some cases.

Post-college preparation opportunities. The second subtheme in relation to undergraduate preparedness is related to programs that help prepare theatre majors for

life after college. About half of the study participants noted that they had a wide range of experiences in relation to post-college preparation opportunities during their undergraduate years. Each participant was asked during their interview whether specific post-college preparation courses and internships were offered as part of their major program to assist undergraduates prepare for life after college as theatre artists. The responses were mixed, often related to the extent that post-graduate programming was offered at a particular institution. Some participants noted that specific post-college courses were offered, as well as internship opportunities, to assist with the transition to life after college. Most of the participants had mixed responses to ease of access to industry theatre experience outside the classroom, as well as the value of their theatre-related internship experiences. Both positive and negative contributors to post-college preparation opportunities are presented below in order from highest to lowest frequency of participant responses.

Positive contributors. Study participants indicated that they had access to post-college preparation opportunities through their undergraduate theatre arts program that were helpful with preparing for life after college as a theatre artist. Three subthemes emerged from coding and analysis of the interviews as positive contributors of interviewee experiences with post-college preparation opportunities: (a) Post-College Preparation Courses, (b) Internship Opportunities, and (c) Teaching Artists.

Post-college preparation courses. About a third of the study participant had access to beneficial courses that helped prepare theatre majors for life after college. Positive perceptions of post-college preparation courses were aligned with type of course, ease of access, and efficacy of the courses offered. Oscar noted that he had “a wonderful

semester class” that helped him to prepare for life after graduation and “definitely helped with my prep outside of college and stuff like that.” Oscar noted that the course was “geared toward after graduation,” and covered such topics as website design, how to audition, and networking where he learned “how to make lasting relationships with other people outside of just doing shows.” Luke also had a similar career preparation course: “They offered auditioning techniques and they offered things like the business of acting.” Evan had a similar a similar college preparation course that dealt with the business aspects of life as a theatre artist, and noted how exceptional it was to have that type of training in college:

One semester we had a class called theater careers, which was all about the nitty-gritty business side of everything. You had to do your taxes, how to do an interview, how to write cover letters, and audition techniques. More of that paper-worky type stuff, which is super helpful, because I have talked to a lot of theater majors who never had that. Not that I'm an expert, but I have a rough idea of, like, that's deductible and that's deductible, and how to do that at the end of the year.

Rachelle talked about the wide-range of topics that were covered in a theatre career course that focused on preparation for actors:

My senior year we had this career prep class. And so that was helpful in a way. We spent the semester finding four monologues that we could keep in our back pockets, and I had two that I felt really strongly about after that. And we worked on how to make our resumes look good and our photos. And then they brought in a professional actor to watch our monologues and give us feedback.

Melissa had access to an optional career preparation course at her institution, but she decided not to take it as it meant paying for additional college credits and that the content of the course covered “how to get nice headshots” and resumes for actors. Melissa commented: “There was one career prep class only offered spring semester... it wasn't a requirement for graduation. They really made it seem like only do this if you have the spare time.”

Internship opportunities. About a third of the participants had access to internship opportunities that were beneficial to their professional development as emerging theatre artists. Sarah noted that she had an internal post-college preparation opportunity through her undergraduate program that allowed her to have the full experience of putting on a production, just as she would in the professional world. Sarah had this to say about this “wonderful opportunity:”

Every year a senior gets an opportunity to direct a show for the department and they get the same budget as any professor. And the expectation is that even though it is a student work, that you have to produce something that the department would be proud of. And I got to do it when I was a senior, which was great. It was an intensive application process. I had a budget of like \$2,000 dollars. I had first pick of actors. I had a whole costume shop working on costumes for me. I had an entire scene shop build the set. I thought that was wonderful and it was a really good opportunity to get students especially interested in directing to strive for something their senior year and to be really focused on in classes.

For other participants, the internship experience was helpful in that it provided insight into what they did *not* want to pursue career-wise after graduation. Naomi noted that: “I did an internship, and that was cool. It was with a touring company. Although I learned that I don't like to tour, so that was valuable.” Brett had a similar experience about his two theatre administrative internships: “I would say they were very fulfilling experiences that taught me that I should not work in that area.” Brett added:

Not that I would say they were negative environments at all, but just that I didn't see myself fitting into an administrative staff at a theater really, which is something that I had thought about, but the politics and the relationships of being a literary manager or literary assistant – it just really didn't appeal to me, ultimately.

Evan talked about how getting his internship in another city was a “safety net” for the first year out of college:

I got an internship and I had never thought about moving, but thought, let's do it. So, I went. I guess was lucky because I had this internship and I had this net for a year. I had housing, a job, so I never fell on hard times, I guess.

Teaching artists. A few study participants noted that one of the most helpful resources to prepare for life after college as a theatre artist was to have access to “teaching artists” – outside professionals in the industry that would come into the classroom and teach a theatre-related workshop or seminar. Naomi noted how access to industry professionals expanded her undergraduate theatre training. Grant also found that bringing in professionals currently working in the theatre industry brought “real life” perspective to the classroom, which provided some reassurance to emerging theatre artists:

They would invite past graduates to either come in and speak or do a Skype session, and it was basically them saying you are going to be fine. Like, it sucks a little bit maybe at first wherever you go for the first year or whatever, but if you stay committed to your goal, whatever it is, whether you want to be a director, actor, designer, whatever, and you keep on keep training and keep looking for those opportunities, then it will be fine.

Negative contributors. About half of the study participants noted that they lacked access to academic opportunities and internships through their undergraduate theatre program to help prepare them for life after college. Two subthemes emerged from coding and analysis of the interview data as negative contributors of interviewee experiences with post-college preparation opportunities: (a) Lack of Post-College Preparation Courses, and (b) Lack of Internship Opportunities. Negative perceptions were attributed to absent or inconsequential programming to prepare theatre arts students for life after college. Other participants noted that outdated faculty members were not able to offer relevant information about the theatre industry. In addition, a few participants also noted that a lack of knowledge of internship opportunities also contributed to negative

perceptions of level of post-college preparation for these theatre arts majors. The lack of access to these types of post-college opportunities was noted by a few participants when they reflected on their undergraduate years after having experienced their transition to life after college. These participants noted that having access to specialized courses, internships, and other professional opportunities would have been helpful in preparation for the challenging lifestyle as an emerging theatre artist.

Lack of post-college preparation courses. About a third of the participants noted that their undergraduate programs did not offer specific post-college preparation courses. Ivy noted: “There wasn't anything in place.” Heather was more adamant about the lack of preparation opportunities at her college: “Not in any way, shape or form did they do so.” Heather went on to note that the department faculty at her alma mater was also not actively engaged with the professional theatre industry:

We got snippets of information, but the professors that were teaching us were not actively involved in theater themselves. So, while they had information based on what they had done when they were our age, they didn't necessarily have up-to-date resumes. So, they were preparing us for what they thought the theater community was, but in reality, they were decades behind where the theater community here in the Twin Cities is at currently.

Sarah stated: “I think that first semester of the senior year having a capstone course where the students were able to talk about potential opportunities would have been so helpful. Or building resumes or connecting with professionals.” Oscar also noted that having a general post-college life course would have been helpful, such as finances or managing independently:

I think even like a class of living on your own. I don't know if that's a real thing. Or like managing budgets, things like that, especially for actors who don't have the largest budgets to manage. How do you feed yourself when you're being paid “xyz” amount, or whatever stuff to make sure you are still on the road you want to be? Things like that. Maybe that could have been called “Budget Constraints” and

would have been good, because I don't really handle money very well.

A couple interviewees noted that they had access to limited post-college preparation opportunities, but that they were not helpful overall. Sarah noted that the timing of her course was too late in her undergraduate program to be effective: “There was a resume workshop, but it was in April, and that's not very helpful in April of your senior year.” Kyle noted that his post-college preparation was limited to a single meeting: “They would go over your resume and stuff like that, but it was very dry. It was a one-hour meeting to get you in and then get you out.”

Lack of internship opportunities. Lack of access to or knowledge of internship opportunities was a factor for about a third of the participants. Faye lamented the lack of theatre internships at her college in order to help foster post-college professional contacts in the theatre industry:

It would have been nice, I think, if there had been some internship program with theaters in the local area to help with that transition from academia... Because in theater it's so much about who you know, and if you work for someone and you do a bad job on that one project because you're just out of college or whatever, then potentially they are not going to ask you back. So, I guess I wish there had been some collaboration between my college and the theaters in the area.

For Melissa, not having internship opportunities or access to other post-college resources during her undergraduate program was particularly disheartening:

I don't believe there were any internships at all. And inching towards graduation, there was no talk of grad school, or internships, or where you should do continuing education. Nothing. Like as soon as you graduated you fell off the face of the planet. Or if you are like me, you were already there.

Similarly, a lack of knowledge of theatre internship opportunities in their undergraduate programs was another significant factor for a couple of participants.

Derrick noted that internships were not communicated effectively in his undergraduate

program: “They would post things on a billboard, but they didn't have any knowledge about it. There was no active guiding hand to instill your independence and your need to just always be searching for opportunities.”

Grant shared a similar story and noted that his program did not clearly communicate available internships for theatre majors. Grant remarked that as a transfer student, he was not “in the know” as much as his peers who started with their theatre arts program as freshmen:

I just don't think I knew about it, and I think a lot of friends did. And I think because I didn't come in right away with that freshman class, I wasn't immediately in those “in” groups and so just didn't hear certain information. I didn't know there was summer stock and internships. I didn't know about these opportunities, and other people did know. I think a lot of what was happening was that I didn't know it existed and they assumed that I knew, so why would they tell me kind of thing. So, I didn't take any internship or really do anything outside of college until after college.

Bachelor of Arts (BA) versus Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) programs. In this study, only three participants graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree (BFA), while the other 17 participants graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree (BA). A BFA in theatre is generally considered a conservatory degree, with a focus on preparing students for a professional career as a theatre artist and concentrates on teaching performance techniques and skills. In addition, a BFA theatre degree has a high number of theatre concentration course requirements, thus limiting other academic opportunities to explore electives or even to double major outside the department. A BFA degree is also highly competitive and usually requires a strenuous audition process and limited admittance into the program.

In comparison, a Bachelor of Arts degree (BA) is a more generalized college degree that provides a broader academic education similar to other liberal arts majors and

does not require an audition to gain admittance into the program. A BA in theatre is generally not considered as prestigious or as selective as a BFA degree in the theatre industry.

Coding and analysis of the data collected during interviews revealed that BFA majors are generally considered to have a greater advantage over BA majors in terms of faculty-focused smaller cohorts and classes, and an undergraduate experience that includes greater opportunities for skill development, performance opportunities, and building networks with local theatre companies. However, there are advantages and disadvantages to both types of programs in regard to post-college preparation for emerging theatre artists, as noted by study participants presented below in order from highest to lowest frequency of participant responses.

Negative contributors. BFA programs tend to be exclusive by design, and often have a more intense focus on their students, compared to BA students. Though not all theatre programs support both a Bachelor of Arts degree track as well as a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree track, many colleges and universities offer both options. In programs that offer both the BA and BFA tracks, students are able to observe the differences between the tracks, including perceived advantages and disadvantages. About a third of the participants who were in BA programs noted that they did not have the same advantages or experiences as the BFA students at their institution, and that each of the programs were perceived to have a different impact on post-college preparation for theatre arts majors. Negative contributors related to BA programs included high student to faculty ratio in programs, lack of visibility and networking opportunities, lack of

access to training and specialized courses, lack of skill set development, and lack of prestige.

BA major Rachelle commented on her perception that the BFA students at her college had greater advantages over BA majors in terms of attention and visibility.

Rachelle described the BFA program at her institution:

They're in a cohort of 20 students their whole four years. And so they become really close, and they're nurtured and mentored and whatever... they're also being seen by all the directors and producers around the city throughout their four years, and so by the time they leave, they already know everyone, and everyone knows their work. And so, they're booking jobs right off the bat, while us in the BA program were like, 'Hi. I can act, too.'

Derrick noted that there was a difference in academic opportunities between the BFA and BA programs at his college:

I definitely wasn't as active socially, because they put a lot of money into the BFA program, and because of that, there were certain classes that I wasn't allowed to take because I did the BA track. Like I couldn't take Shakespeare, for example. And because I wasn't allowed to take any acting class over two classes, of course I wasn't then able to have the skill set to perform and things like that. So, I only performed twice as ensemble.

Melissa also commented on the disadvantages she perceived between her BA program versus the more inclusive BFA program at her college:

Going into the program I already knew or felt lesser than, as far as programs go, because they had that distinction between one that you have to audition for, and it's really prestigious and it's only 20 people – and the mess of literally anybody else who wants to go. You didn't have to apply specifically. You didn't even have to be a major. You just kind of were dumped into this group... So already I feel like I was in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people... I don't have these good memories of like rehearsing with my classmates or networking with professors. I felt very, very fringe.

Ivy commented that she and her peers called BFA students the “BFA mafia” and that right out of college, BFA graduates get preference for acting roles and “kind of swoop in and they've got claim to the land, as it were.” Ivy went on to discuss how she

viewed the networking advantages of BFA students:

It's difficult to compete with people who have been networking and connecting since their freshman year... It's not that the BFA students are any better actors than anyone who came from a liberal arts college. It's just that they have more connections and they have been taught how to do the networking, which is great... but I also think that networking is a big thing that we need to learn.

Rachelle did not pursue the BFA track: “The thing that was scary for me is you had to audition, and I was like I don't know what that means, so I'm just not going to do it.” Rachelle later regretted her decision not to audition for the BFA program and talked about her frustration with her own BA program:

By my senior year, I'm sort of feeling like this BA program was a waste of my time. Just feeling inadequate in terms of the skill set that I have and the development that I've gotten out of the BA program so far. Because I felt as a senior, the BA program was designed to say, you guys are not going to be the actors. You guys are going to have to figure out how to make your way in theatre in some other way, so we're just going to give you the tools so you can be successful behind the scenes. And that's not what I wanted. So, I left the program feeling like a second-rate actor compared to the BFA students.

Of the three BFA majors, only Evan found limitations with having a specialized degree. Evan noted that with his focus in acting, he was limited in his course options: “Directing and playwriting were the electives that I took. I learned voice, movement, scene study, and those specifics – for better or for worse.” Evan further commented that broader courses were “not an option” and went on to observe the pros and cons of both degrees:

It's tough with a BFA because you know what it is going into it. It was after I graduated where I thought, hmm, maybe it would have been beneficial to be more well-rounded than my theater education. Maybe the BA students knew what they were doing... I wish if I hadn't been a BFA I would have had time for a double major, which would have been nice to have something maybe in business or marketing. Just because when you get out, the BFA is so specialized, which is fantastic, but you realize that a degree is a degree. But it does limit you in what you ultimately know, so I had to gain all that experience in the real world, temping and doing desk jobs. But, yeah, I wish I could have had a more well-rounded education.

Positive contributors. The few BFA majors generally found their programs to be a positive experience due to low faculty to student ratios, challenging programs, and individual programming. Evan noted that: “It was fun and challenging. The B.F.A. program was really good. The teachers really cared about us as students and were good teachers.” Teresa also noted the benefits of being in a more selective BFA program with fewer students:

There were four other people in my BFA acting class. When you only have a class with five people in it, your professors get very close to you. They really care about your individual progress and it's not about creating a cookie cutter. It's about really molding someone to be the best that they can be.

Second Theme – Post-College Experiences: Career, Finances, and Other Factors

To gain a basic understanding and context of the lives of recent theatre arts graduates, study participants were asked during their interviews to describe their future plans at the time of graduation: “Tell me about any plans or objectives you had for a career as an artist.” Follow-up questions included: “Tell me about the main experiences you had as a theatre artist after college,” and “Tell me about any other life factors that impacted you during your transition after college.” Responses to these questions revealed not only the post-college intentions of interviewees, but also led to a discussion of their actual experiences in relation to their career and the challenges they faced as emerging artists in the theatre industry. Study participants discussed their goals and how their lives unfolded after graduation in relation to career, finances and additional aspects of their lives. In relation to pursuing a career in theatre, participants discussed several aspects of working as a theatre artist, including finding work, geographical location, and living a freelance lifestyle. In relation to examining how finances impacted their lives as theatre artists, study participants discussed how monetary considerations, including day jobs,

family financial support, personal debt, and limited income impacted their choices and opportunities. Finally, participants described how personal relationships and the prospect of pursuing an advanced degree impacted their post-college transition.

The second primary theme of “Career, Finances, and Other Factors as a Theatre Artist” emerged from coding and analysis of participant responses collected across interviews. The following subthemes were identified under each of the three subthemes: (a) Career: geographical location, auditions, finding “gigs” and freelance lifestyle; (b) Finances: family financial support, student loan debt, cost of living; and (c) Other Factors: relationships, graduate school, and alternative career path. Participant comments for each area are presented below from highest to lowest percentage of responses in each subtheme.

Career. To gain a better understanding of the theatre lifestyle, participant quotes that were obtained during the interviews are noted below in relation to various aspects of pursuing a career as a theatre artist. Understanding the context of different aspects of working in the theater industry may help the reader situate the transitional challenges related to career objectives, goals and experiences associated with emerging theatre artists after college graduation.

Individuals who pursue acting and other theatre jobs usually work as freelancers. In the context of this study, a theatre freelancer is defined as working non-permanent, multiple short jobs with a variety of theatre companies. Theatre freelancers often work for minimal to no pay, especially in the initial stages of their professional career, as they develop connections, experience and qualifications in the theatre industry. In addition, theatre jobs are highly competitive and obtaining work is inconsistent for most theatre

artists, so most artists work additional “day” jobs to pay for daily living expenses while pursuing their artistic careers. The section below covered several aspects of a career in theatre, including the importance of geographical location in relation to career trajectory, the audition process, finding paid and unpaid work as theatre artists, and pursuing different career tracks in the theatre industry.

Geographical location. About two-thirds of the study participants discussed geographical location in relation to their work as theatre artists. Interviewees discussed living and working in the Twin Cities metropolitan area compared to other theatre cities and how their choices were made based on a variety of career and personal factors. A “theatre city” for this study is defined as a city where a substantial amount of theatre is created and performed, and theatre work opportunities are significantly greater than other geographical locations. Reasons that participants gave for choosing a geographical location after college – often through a process of elimination – included recommendations by friends, size and perception of city characteristics, close proximity to family, affordability, and perceived access to multiple theatre job opportunities. Participant responses are divided between the Twin Cities and other theatre cities, such as Chicago, New York and Los Angeles in the section below. Participants responses regarding geographical location are presented below from highest to lowest frequency.

Other theatre cities. New York City has traditionally been the penultimate destination for many theater artists. Achieving the status of “Broadway star” is often the goal of many young theatre artists, and actors are also drawn to Los Angeles, the heart of the film and television industry, due to the potential of higher pay and visibility associated with media work. Other large cities may also have attraction for theatre artists

if they have a vital theatre scene, such as Ivy who noted: “I did know at some point I wanted to move to London and do theatre there.” About two-thirds of the participants discussed their thoughts on other theatre cities in relation to their career and personal goals. Responses included concerns with readiness and lack of theatre credentials for “big” cities, other locations in relation to personal and professional preferences, and leaving the door open for moving to another city in the future.

For some participants, the concept of working in New York City is intimidating. Austin commented on his decision to eliminate New York as a place to pursue theatre work: “I like big city, but that was a little too big city for me.” Sarah had similar sentiments: “I knew I wasn’t ready for New York. I don’t think I’ll ever be ready for New York.” For other participants, working as a theatre artist in New York City is something that they are not yet ready to commit to unless they have something in place before relocating there. Melissa noted that she did not have the skills yet to succeed in New York: “I didn’t have the credentials. I knew I would have to consider myself to be successful here before I went out there.” Derrick had a similar sentiment: “I made a promise to myself that I will never move to New York or anything like that unless there is a job lined up.” Carolyn noted that she did not have a network of connections in New York City, thus making it a challenging proposition:

A lot of people were, like, why would you not move to New York? I was, like, because I know that I am not going to get any work in New York right now. I don’t have any connections there. I don’t have any experience. I don’t have a resume. I think I would be totally lost in New York.

However, other interviewees indicated that the door still remained open to explore other regions and cities if the opportunity should present itself. Evan remarked that he thinks about New York City “all the time” as a possibility for the future. Oscar noted: “If

an opportunity arose in which I had a calling in New York or if there was an audition in New York, I would definitely go there.”

Heather, who is pursuing stage management, lived in New York City right after college to try the theatre scene there for a gap year before starting college: “I actually did a couple of off-Broadway shows. And I did some event work, as well. So, I was working. I could have kept working, but for my mental health and my sanity and financial reasons, I decided to come home.” Heather went on to gain more experience and credentials in the Twin Cities: “I came home specifically to do more work... which I felt was more important to gain those skills than be drowning with millions out in New York.” Despite the challenges she found in New York, Heather plans to move back in the near future to pursue her dreams of working on Broadway. Heather compared the differences she found between New York and Minneapolis:

I think, in my experience, no matter how many people you know out there, New York is a very lonely place. There are so many people, so you are competing with so many people to do these things. And everything is fast paced. Often a lot more money is involved, so the stakes are significantly higher, and they make it, in my experience, they make it very clear that if you can't do this, the person standing right next to you can, and they are watching you. So, kind of do it or lose it. Whereas here, I think, I grew up here, so I am ingrained in the Minnesota-nice mentality. There is just more compassion in the work, I think, and I think it's a little bit slower paced and there is more humility involved in the work, in my experience.

Twin Cities location. There were a variety of reasons why about half of the participants chose to move to or stay in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area and adjacent theatrical industry over other theatre cities. These reasons included cost of living, personal connections, and preference for the Twin Cities theatre scene. Kyle noted that the Twin Cities was neither too big, nor too small: “I am really glad that I landed in the Twin Cities because there is a lot of theatre, but it feels like a very comfortable city... but

not intimidating.” Grant chose to live in Minneapolis based on a process of elimination: “New York was too expensive... and I have friends who lived here. It wasn't too terribly thought out aside from I can't afford New York and I don't really like the vibe I was getting in Chicago.” Teresa had a similar process:

I really don't like New York City... I could not handle it there. So, it was either New York City, here, or Chicago. But I didn't really like the theatre scene in Chicago, it wasn't my style... so I was, like, Minneapolis it is.

For others in the Twin Cities, Minneapolis was recommended by friends, and also had the attraction of being a good fit and close to family, such as was the case with Austin:

I was talking to my best friend at the time and she was, like, ‘Maybe you should try Minneapolis, as that is just as good a theatre area up there.’ And that is when I started looking, and I was, like, this is where I want to be. I liked everything about it. It's not like moving to the East coast, or the West coast, and family was still relatively close so that I could call them if I needed them.

Carolyn decided to remain in Minnesota after going to college here instead of moving to another city where she did not have a network in place: “All of my friends from college are moving to Minneapolis, so why would I give up on having that kind of support system?” Carolyn continued: “Also being in a small market that is really thriving – maybe that wouldn't be such a bad thing to do for a year.”

Naomi came to the conclusion that the Twin Cities was the best fit for her after having lived there for a while after college graduation:

I'm a Twin Cities actress. I have no desire to try to go to London, go to New York, go to Seattle and any of those other big theatre places. Or even tour. I am content and happy in the Twin Cities... Out of college I was, like, the Twin Cities theatre community – it's cool, but maybe I should move to New York. Whereas now, it's like, no. This is my place. This is my theater community for the foreseeable future.

Auditions. For actors, which accounted for about half of the study participants, auditioning for shows in the theatre industry (acting roles or parts in a production) is akin to interviewing for regular jobs in other industries. As Vanessa noted: “Auditions. That's how you get the parts. So that's a pretty big thing.”

Finding an acting job is generally challenging for most actors, based on the availability of roles and the part being an appropriate match for the actor. Study participants noted that as actors they often need to audition for multiple productions and take minimal roles, especially when they first start out. Grant stated that: “I was auditioning for everything that I was fit for and then taking whatever was offered.” Brett noted that even finding roles to audition for was a challenge: “In looking at the listing of auditions, I never really seemed to find roles that I felt I could get, for whatever reason.” Brett went on to talk about how hard it was to make connections for potential acting opportunities:

I just didn't feel that I knew anyone. I literally knew people, but I didn't know who to work with. I didn't know... there are such natural ways to collaborate in college. You just interview to produce, and you show up for auditions. So I just didn't know what I was doing.

Austin, who relocated to the Twin Cities specifically to find theatre work, was encouraged by his girlfriend to stop being selective for what he auditioned for and audition for everything. Austin related the change in how he viewed the audition process:

When we were going home for Thanksgiving, my girlfriend was like, ‘You know you wanted to do theatre when you got up here, right?’ And I am, like, ‘Yeah.’ ‘Then why aren't you auditioning for everything you can get your hands on?’ And I am just like, ‘Okay. Okay, I get that.’ And she was like, ‘We moved up here and I don't want it to be a waste of our time.’ And I'm like, ‘I'll get on it.’

Since there is a greater supply (actors) than demand (roles) for actors, competition is high for acting jobs. It is likely an actor will receive many more rejections than actually

land a job in the theatre business. This is particularly true for women, as there are historically far fewer roles for women than men and far greater numbers of female actors than male actors. For recent theatre graduates, the reality of the market can be daunting as they work to build their credentials in the theatre industry. Participants discussed the challenge of having to audition repeatedly before landing a role in a show. Rachelle remembered the constant rejection when she began auditioning for roles after college and thought: “This is really hard. I don’t know that I want to keep hearing rejection over and over again.” Grant noted that to cope with the audition process that: “You develop a thick skin pretty quickly. It helps, at least in this town, that there’s constantly auditions happening, so if you don’t get one, you have another one to look forward to.”

Austin discussed his philosophy of not yet getting cast in a show since his graduation from college in 2015:

Stage performance-wise, I haven’t gotten anything yet. One of the first things was knowing I’m going to get a lot of “noes” in this line of work. I basically take it as you’re going to get a thousand noes before your first yes, and I think I am around 650 noes left. That just keeps me humble because every time I could think, well, they just didn’t like me, I was terrible, or things like that, I normally say to myself just, well, I just wasn’t what they were looking for this time, so on to the next one.

For Ivy, the audition process was further challenged by the lack of available female roles: “It also doesn’t help that there aren’t a ton of roles for young women in their early twenties.” Ivy also talked about how the audition process unfolded for her after graduation and the limited opportunities available:

The first month of living here was very exciting. I went to nine different auditions. It was just always new, always learning, meeting new people, seeing new faces, learning my way around the city. It was very exciting, but after a while, after your 10th or 11th audition, you start getting really tired... then I started auditioning for more things and not getting into them. I think the frustration set in again right around when I was auditioning for more things,

because, again, parts were scarce... Looking back I realize it was, like, fear that I would never get another part again...

Luke, who had the rare opportunity to audition for a well-known Broadway show, talked about the highs and lows of auditioning for one of the most competitive roles in the theatre industry – a Broadway musical:

It was great and awesome. I sang and tap-danced and worked my butt off for that, and I stood in line with a bunch of guys that looked exactly like me. And I was holding a number and they went down the line and they were like, ‘Okay number 27 and 29 you can stay, and thank you everyone else, but you can leave.’ And I was not picked, and I was really disheartened by the whole process of it. I think that I have heard no lots of times before that. I absolutely heard no, because I was auditioning for things already. But that was the most painful.

Finding gigs. Generally, a “gig” is a term used by artists for short-term jobs in their artistic field. Musicians frequently use this term when hired to perform for one or more nights at an event, but theatre artists also use the term “gig” for temporary theatre jobs (e.g., an acting role that has a few weeks of rehearsals, plus a dozen performances). A theatre gig can pay nothing (e.g., a community theater production), a stipend (e.g., usually a small, fixed sum of money per job), or have a contract with more substantial pay (e.g., formal contracts with larger theater companies). For this study, a “gig” is defined as one theatre job that an artist is working on for a theatre company, and the number of gigs can range from zero to several jobs a year depending on how frequently the artist is hired. A gig can be for pay, which is the desired outcome for most theatre artists. However, some artists choose to take gigs that do not pay, but which add valuable experience to their portfolio or resume. Choosing gigs for pay versus gigs for experience are explored in the section below through the comments of interviewees.

Gigs for pay. The ultimate goal for most theatre professionals is to find a way to get paid for the artistic work they love to do. About half of the participants noted that

finding paying theatre gigs is challenging – either through acquiring any theatre job or landing a gig that pays a living wage. Most community theaters do not pay actors or creative team members and instead rely on volunteers. Many small theater companies try to offer actors at least a small stipend to cover transportation costs, but the amount does not usually meet even minimum wage requirements. It is financially difficult for most aspiring actors if they are not being paid enough to balance out the effort and time commitment involved with each theatre job. Ivy related her excitement at being offered a paying acting job:

I got a part in a show that another friend called me up and said, ‘We open in a week, can you take this part?’ And I was like, ‘Sure, yes!’ And she said, ‘Great! We are going to pay you for this one.’ And I was like, yes! I will take that money because it is hard to find a stable job as an actor unless you are already established.

Oscar noted that he was fortunate to get offers for small-stipend paying gigs since he started looking for acting jobs:

I am still kind of new here, so I get mostly stipend paid theater companies, which have been really great from \$50 to \$400 kind of ballpark, which I expected, and I mean it's wonderful that they pay. They appreciate your work, they acknowledge it, and I think that's really wonderful.

Conversely, Rachelle noted her experience working on a six-week show with a large commitment and minimal pay, and which did not allow her to keep her day job:

I only got a \$100 for the whole show, which was tough, because I wasn't able to go to work during the show. And then I'm also having to pay for parking. I actually lost money doing that show, which was hard.

For Grant, the issue of pay keeps evolving from job to job:

My goal was to just do whatever you can. Get a day job and just do paid or unpaid acting. Doesn't matter. Take any theatre job you can get. And at first that worked. And then after a while, I just started to take myself more seriously and just thought it wasn't worth my time to do unpaid work. So, I eventually was, like, I'm not going to do any unpaid work. And for the past three years I haven't done unpaid work, but I still can't afford to quit my day job. It's sometimes \$50 for a

two-month show, and sometimes \$1,300 for one month, so it's very different and wildly varying.

Eventually, Grant determined that pay was not the only issue that impacted whether or not to take a job: "What happened was I got past the point of only doing paid work, and I got to the point just getting paid isn't enough. I have to like the show that I am in and it has to mean something to me."

Naomi determined early in her career that she would work only for pay: "I made a promise to myself never to act without pay, which was something that I was fine with doing before." Naomi determined that her training and experience should be compensated accordingly:

I had decided I have training in this. I went to school for this. I am paying thousands of dollars for this. I'm a professional. I deserve pay for my art. And only once since graduation have I been in a show where I didn't get paid... You get paid for \$800 for one show and \$100 for another, and is that okay? Am I cool with the fact that I'm giving hours and hours of my time and energy for \$100? When do I decide that pay of any sort isn't good enough? Because that's where I am right now. I'm like, I will not do a show for free. Pay me \$25, okay, sure. I'll consider that. And when does it have to be higher. I'll find out, but maybe there's not a cut and clear answer.

Teresa similarly decided that she equated being paid with being valued as an actor:

A lot of theatre doesn't really pay or pays not enough for a real actor... and I had to make a decision of, am I going to do this theatre job that doesn't pay me adequately for my time, but I get to do work and they pay something? Or am I not going to do as much theatre, but they actually pay me a good amount of what they should? And I decided the latter. I decided I don't really need to work for \$200 for a whole production. That was a hard decision, because I see a lot of my colleagues doing a lot of that theatre, but I decided my time is worth it and I think it is devaluing me.

Gigs for experience. As theatre artists start out in the professional world, they often take theatre jobs without pay to build their resume credentials. About a third of the participants took unpaid theatre work. As Kyle noted when looking for directing jobs

right out of college, he chose the kind of jobs that provide an opportunity to “just do stuff that I can start doing to build up more of a theatre resume.” These gigs for experience are almost always freelance jobs or part-time work on top of a regular “day” job that pays the daily bills. Even when artists are offered jobs for experience, they sometimes need to turn them down for practical reasons.

The decision of whether to take an unpaid acting role is often dependent on such things as length of time commitment and additional transportation costs involved. Brett had to make such a decision for a small role in the chorus of a show and declined because: “they offered me an unpaid ensemble role, but I didn't take it because it would have been a big-time commitment.” Austin commented on his decision to turn down a role because of financial and other responsibilities:

There was an audition that I did do that they offered me the lead role that I had to turn down because I didn't have any money to pay for gas. So, part of it was just like, you have student loans coming up, you need a car, you need so many things and you need to be an adult right now and doing a community theatre job is not going to help you.

For other artists, there is internal conflict with significant time commitment for minimal compensation. Sarah took a directing internship right after graduation in order to gain experience with a local theatre company:

I had a production internship where you attended rehearsals and then you were crew for the show. And it paid nothing. I thought it would be great. And it was like the longest three months of my life. I think we ended up getting paid a hundred dollars for three months of close to full-time work.

However, sometimes there is a greater benefit of working for no pay. For Ivy, working on a regular basis, even when she was not getting paid, was very fulfilling:

I did three shows one after the other. I was fully occupied from the beginning of January to the beginning of August, which was fantastic. And I was like, oh my gosh, I'm living the dream right now. I may not be making money from any of these, but it is feeding my soul and that is what I need right now.

Freelance lifestyle. Recent theatre arts graduates found that the irregularity and inconsistency of theatre jobs was often an unexpected aspect of a freelance lifestyle for study participants. Many theatre artists have the additional responsibility of intricate time management of multiple jobs, choosing the right gigs to take, handling complex taxes, and continuing to finance additional training as artists with workshops and classes to hone their craft. About a third of the study participants talked about a career as a freelancer and the additional challenges of an entrepreneurial lifestyle without guaranteed regular work, pay, or benefits – often on top of a regular day job to pay for daily cost of living expenses.

Faye knew the career path that she wanted to take was to be a full-time costumer for large theaters, but the jobs coming in were irregular for the first year: “At the beginning, I didn't always know what I was going to be doing a couple of months from now. It wasn't until maybe a year after I graduated that I really had stuff lined up for the next six months.” Faye went on to note the additional challenges of the amount of balancing and self-discipline it took to master a freelance career path:

I did not anticipate being a freelancer, which is what I am now, and I really like it. I also definitely don't think I understood the financial gravity in terms of... at the point I am as an emerging artist, I can't support myself just on the freelance work that I do. So, I have a part-time job. And I also didn't realize just how much of a balancing act that would be. It goes back to when you enter college. You have so much independence, but when you leave college, all of a sudden you have full control over, like, 100% of the minutes of your day. There is no one looking over your shoulder saying are you meeting this deadline. There are deadlines associated with every kind of show, but it's up to you to be, like, how much work, how many hours am I going to put into this show, and how am I going to divide that out between the four weeks that I now have. So, it is very much a learning experience at the beginning, and I've gotten a lot better.

For Heather, the freelance lifestyle was something she was concerned about from the time of graduation, but her concerns were balanced by a strong belief that she was in

the right field:

I was feeling very confident that what I was wanting and planning to pursue post-college was the correct thing for me. But I was anxious about the freelance aspect of it all. I felt isolated in the fact that I was choosing this "unstable" career path, whereas many of my friends were feeling and deciding to put down some roots in some places.

Brett found that the freelance lifestyle that goes along with being an actor was not conducive to healthy living, and that was not something he wanted to continue to pursue after college:

I think it was partially that I saw friends trying to do everything and wait tables and have five hours of rehearsal every night. I knew I couldn't do that. I knew that I didn't have the stamina, I guess. I had some health problems at the end of college, so I was trying to keep myself sane and I knew that living that lifestyle would not be conducive to staying healthy.

For most freelancers starting out, pulling enough work together to make a living is a challenge. However, Jena was able to make a full-time living as a freelance stage manager – a rarity for a recent college graduate pursuing a career in theatre. Jena talked about how she chooses freelance gigs:

I really have been fortunate enough to kind of make most of my living off of stage management. I still have a couple of day jobs here and there, but for the most part I am able to live off of what I make as a stage manager. It's awesome... I have been really fortunate to have lots of work thrown my way, but I knew I needed to be choosy about what jobs I accepted, because you have to live... So basically, when I have to choose to take a job, I look at it, like, am I going to be making money off this, or is it going to cost me money to work for you? And am I going to enjoy it? Those are always the tipping factors.

Finances. Theatre arts graduates face many of the same financial challenges shared by a majority of recent college graduates, including student loan debt and cost-of-living expenses. However, an analysis of the data collected during participant interviews found two additional financial aspects that impact an artistic career path: “survival day jobs” and “family financial support.” At least two-thirds of the participants were

impacted to some degree by finances in one area or more areas. Participant responses on these four financial subthemes will be presented in the following order from highest to lowest percentages: (a) Survival Day Jobs, (b) Family Financial Support, (c) Student Loan Debt, and (d) Cost of Living.

Survival day jobs. For many theatre artists, a regular full-time day job (or combination of multiple part-time jobs) often supports what they consider their “real work” – pursuing a career in their chosen artistic field. The term “survival day job” is what theatre artists use to describe their non-theatre, full-time regular job that is necessary to pay for cost-of-living expenses, though it is considered secondary in importance to their theatrical pursuits. About two-thirds of the study participants discussed how their “survival job” impacts their lives as theatre artists in a multitude of ways, including jobs with limited flexibility, jobs that are “soul-draining,” leaving jobs for artistic gigs, and finding day jobs that are a good match for a theatre artist. The type of jobs that participants were employed at during their post-college years included full-time and part-time work in retail, food service, customer service, office work, temporary jobs, theater administration, and teaching jobs.

Austin noted that his first job out of college was at a fast-food restaurant, which he found disappointing and did not align with his minimum hopes for a theatrical career:

At first it was, like, I'm going to find something, I'll get something easy out of college, something that pays the bills, something like that. And then I was, like, it's going to be easy. I'll be set. I'll be fine. That's all that matters. And then that slowly did not become the case.

A few participants noted that they had difficulty finding the right “day job” fit as a theatre artist. Kyle noted: “I don't want to end up working in some marketing firm in some city in a cubicle. If I'm going to be in a cubicle, I want to be in a theater office

doing something for a theater.” Melissa could not find a job that had enough flexibility: “I have not found a job that I can do from nine to five, Monday through Friday, that pays enough. That is flexible enough for rehearsals or auditions. And that doesn't drain my soul so that I want to go to rehearsal at night.” Naomi talked about her conflict with day jobs versus pursuing her acting career:

How much time am I allowed to take doing day jobs and trying to be an actor, before the day jobs have to become my real job and acting becomes a hobby? And resisting the idea that acting is a hobby. Acting is my career, and my day jobs are just my day jobs. And I'm terrified for the day that has to transition.

Carolyn had a similar philosophy with regard to her day job versus her acting career when she applied to her last employer: “I was very clear when I interviewed with them that this is my day job. I'm an actor and that's my career. This is my job. And I need to have the flexibility so that I can go to auditions.” Sarah stated that she was looking for a new position, after quitting a recent day job, in order to find a work situation that would meet her needs as a theatre artist:

I don't know what the perfect day job is for a theatre artist. I'm trying to find it. I would love to know what it is. Part of the reason I quit my job is that I worked from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Starting at 9 a.m. is really great when you are a theatre artist. Ending at 6 p.m. is not so great. You're not going to get back in time for rehearsal.

Ivy also noted the challenge of finding a suitable day job as an actor: “Because there is not a lot of steady pay for actors, you kind of feel like you have to take a full-time job, and I'd say that's a factor that was very challenging to sort of negotiate.” Ivy went on to describe her experience of working at a “desk” job in a field outside of the theatre industry:

I know if I were to take something that didn't have some kind of connection it would destroy my soul. Not to be too dramatic, but I did have a job that was like that, and I felt it eating away at me every single day that I was in it. It was a desk job. It had been eating away at my soul for a while. I was making really good

money and the hours were flexible. I could message my boss that I was going to an audition, and she would be, 'Awesome! Have fun!' and she would send me off. But it was draining, and the lights were dim and the whole place was dark.

Participants also talked about the difficult decision of staying with their day job or leaving it for a theatre gig if there was a scheduling conflict. Rachelle made such a choice between her day job and an acting gig when she called in "sick" when her work schedule conflicted with performance times – and how that decision was a pivotal point for her as a theatre artist:

They were like, 'That is not okay, and we know why you're calling in sick.' And I was, like, 'Well, I don't know what to tell you.' So, I quit that job and did the show, and lost more money paying for parking and not having a job... So, this was a pivotal point of, like, you have to decide if you're going to continue to pursue acting even though you make no money doing it, or if you're going to go back to the nine-to-five that kills you internally, your spirit. So, I chose to keep acting.

Grant dealt with similar challenges of having to quit a well-paying day job when he was offered a touring theatre gig:

To go on that tour – and this was one of the things that was hard for me, but I thought was necessary – was I had these really well-paying office jobs, but... I might not always be a salesman, but I will always be an actor, so whatever day job I have to do is what I'll do. So, I quit the really well-paying office job to take a lesser-paying, more satisfying job. And that was hard the first time I had to do that... Then I took another job where I already knew that six months down the line I already had another tour lined up, and when I took the job my boss goes, 'You're not going to leave us in a few months, are you? I see you go on tours here.' And I was like, 'No, I have no plans to leave.' So, I don't like lying to people, and I didn't want to do it, but at the same time I knew they could absorb the loss better than I could go without an acting job. And so, I had that second job a few months and then quit to go on the tour again and then came back.

Naomi discussed how her need for a flexible job schedule means working in jobs with low wages:

I think more than anything, I found how I need to allow the theatre to dictate the rest of my jobs. If I really want to be available to take that role where I'm working matinees or be available to take that role where I am working all day with rehearsals and then performances in the evening, for example. Because, you

know, sometimes rehearsal schedules are strange and weird, so I need to have jobs that are flexible. Which means I can't have a normal office job, and I need to be in these flexible jobs that pay frustratingly low, because that's important for me – at least right now – to have that flexibility so I can act.

Though several of the participants commented on the challenges related to survival day jobs, a few participants found positive aspects with non-theatre job. Ivy found a job in the service industry that is fulfilling work:

I am in a job right now that I love compared to the other two. It's a fast-paced, it's challenging, and there's that people connection that I love. And I think that has also kind of deterred me from going to auditions, because I feel that I am getting more satisfaction out of this then going to audition after audition after audition and not getting anything.

Teresa also has a job that she loves – teaching music, which has the added bonus of providing enough income so that she can concentrate on her artistic endeavors:

That's kind of my main job and sustains me. I don't have another job. I don't wait tables, I don't do anything else. I just teach... I am so thankful to have such a perfect job that I love doing. I love it so much. I have such a blast every day getting to do this. It is hard work a lot of the time and it is not easy, but it is so fun. So that when I go in to do theater, I just can put all of myself into it. And I don't have even a sliver of, oh my gosh, this is great, but I don't know how I'm going to pay my mortgage. It's amazing. I love it so much.

Luke found that there can be a benefit to working a day job during the lengthy downtime between theatre gigs:

They tell you about the dry spells that happen in your careers, but no one tells you what to do with those dry spells and how much they are a blessing. Like, sometimes you just need to not do anything theatre or art related. Sometimes you really just need to work that temp job in order to appreciate and go back into the theatre scene with an artistic mind set.

Family financial support. About half of the participants noted that they had family financial support to help them launch their careers as theatre artists. The financial support from family members (e.g., parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc.) for these participants included housing assistance, paying for acting workshops and national

theatre programs, and providing college tuition – thus eliminating student debt loans for several of the interviewees. In addition, family financial support also reduced the need to work a full-time job immediately after college in a job outside the theatre industry, allowing more time and flexibility to attend auditions and take other theatre gigs with rehearsal schedules that would otherwise interfere with regular job hours.

Individuals with additional financial support may have a better chance to succeed during their early professional years if they receive assistance to pay for their living expenses. Parents were particularly helpful for several study participants right out of college. Heather noted: “I have been very fortunate in financial support from my family.” Brett also talked about how his parents supported him right out of college, which allowed him time to find a job: “Family-wise, I have had good financial support from my parents, so I was able to scrape by my first few months when I didn't yet have a job here.” Brett also commented that though he did have student loans, he is not responsible for them: “My parents deal with it.” Grant noted that he also had parental support with student loan debt: “They pay them off. I am very fortunate in that.”

Beyond parental assistance, financial support also came from extended family connections and inheritance money. Paige talked about how her aunt and uncle, who had no children of their own, paid for her college education. Paige stated: “It’s because of them that I don't have any student loans. And I tell them every time I see them that I could not be doing this without you.” Paige also talked about how she is “forever in their debt” for additional financial support that came from her grandparents and aunt who shared her love of theatre. Paige related what her aunt told her at the time of her inheritance:

‘Your grandmother and grandfather would just be so thrilled that you're pursuing a life in the arts. That's what your grandfather's hard-earned money is for – to support you during this time so you can pursue these opportunities that you might not otherwise be able to.’

Kyle also benefited from inheritance money from his grandmother, which gave him the option to move to the Twin Cities to pursue a career in theatre:

My dad told me that if I found something in a different city, we could take my grandmother's inheritance money and use that to move me to a different city. I was, like, okay, that takes care of the money problem... Once I knew that I could get my inheritance early, basically that's what really changed everything. Because until my Dad said we can take your inheritance and use that to move you somewhere, I was stuck.

Student loan debt. The cost of going to college has risen dramatically in recent decades for all college students, including theatre arts majors. About a third of the participants noted that their student loan debt, which was in the tens of thousands for some participants, was a significant factor that negatively impacted their current financial situation. Melissa commented on her student loan debt, which she mostly put on personal credit cards:

Student loans. Oh my God, student loans. I realized maybe mid-way through my college career that I didn't even know how to apply for student loans properly. I had no scholarships. My student loans were mostly on me. I used a lot of credit cards to pay for my student loans, and it was like this whole awful cycle.

Austin also has significant college loan debt and discussed the challenge of making student loan payments on a very limited income:

I'm \$60,000 in debt with student loans. I also have a car payment and I also have rent, and I only get paid ten bucks an hour. It was a stretch, but at least I was able to defer my federal payments and that has helped so much. It's just the private loans that I have that they're just, like, you have to pay us or nothing. And I'm just, like, you'll get paid when I have the money.

Naomi noted that it will also take time for her to pay off student loans because of the size of her college debt:

I didn't have parental units that helped me pay the bills, so the idea that soon I'll be paying off college loans was pretty scary. I want to pay those loans off as soon as possible, but that's not going to happen. They are very big.

Vanessa noted that her student loan debt affected which acting jobs she was able to pursue:

I had student loans, but they are really not that bad compared to some people. But I have student loans, so it's of course hard sometimes to, like, want to try for something that I know was going to take up a lot more time, but I'm not going to get compensated as much for it when I still need to work to make money.

Cost of living. About a third of the participants discussed the challenges that they had with regard to cost-of-living expenses, including job choices, housing costs, paying bills, and the reality of trying to make ends meet while pursuing a career in theatre with minimal income. Participants noted that money was an ongoing concern, since it is difficult to make a living wage as a theatre artist. Melissa stated a common theme among those interviewed: "A majority of my thoughts are consumed by money. So, a lot of it is how can I make more money? How can I work less and make more?" For Austin, paying for the basics was his first priority:

It was just making sure that the priorities of paying for the shelter first, then the electricity and such, and then pay for the necessities, because I didn't want to be homeless... I felt I had the weight of the world on my shoulders. It was honestly – I am sure I got plenty of gray hairs from that experience. It was how am I going to pay the bills? It was constant budget crunching. It was figuring out how to get by. How to put food on the table and how to feed all the pets we have. It was crazy.

Derrick commented on his "biggest life mistake after college," and how the choice to live independently right after graduation cost him financially in terms of paying rent as he was trying to enter the professional theatre industry. Derrick talked about how he should have lived at home and saved more money as he looked for his first job: "I spent a lot of money on a not-good apartment. I was never home, because I was temping

and doing shows, so basically, I was paying for a bed.” Kyle shared similar feelings:

I probably honestly should have moved back home sooner and gotten a job and lived at home and try to build up money with not having to worry about rent and bills. And that might have been better, because what kept me from building up any money was paying rent and paying utilities and all that.

Grant noted that when he decided to take a lesser-paying job in order to take a theatre gig, it put stress on his relationship: “It does make things iffy and scary when I’ve had to quit a job, or especially when I’ve had to tell my girlfriend, hey, I know we need the money, but I’m going to quit this job and take this other lesser paying job.”

Other participants noted that having a good paying “day job” makes paying the bills easier. Faye talked about having a backup plan after graduation if things eventually became more challenging financially:

I grew an awareness of my financial situation, so that was something that I really had to sit down with and be, like, what is my plan B? What is my plan C?... Financially I feel insecure, because right now I don’t have a mortgage. I don’t have kids. I’m still covered on my parent’s health insurance. But that’s all going to go away and so hopefully I will have a little buffer room. So, I will have to figure out what to do with that.

Evan noted that having a well-paying day job created internal conflict based on his changing priorities:

I guess in the grand scheme of the world I’m a poor person. But for my benefit, I’m fine. I don’t have children to support. I’m not married. I have a really great relationship with my girlfriend right now, so we split rent and everything is comfortable. But I got into that mode of, like, man, I can make a lot of money and then I can buy all these things and do all this stuff. So recently, I was like, wow, is that important to me right now? I certainly don’t romanticize poverty. I don’t want to be poor. I don’t want to be living paycheck to paycheck by the time I am 40, but I think right now I can be okay with that, because I am okay.

Other factors. In addition to career and finances, participants were asked to discuss any other factors that may have influenced their post-college transition process as theatre artists. About two-thirds of the participants noted two significant factors that

emerged from coding and analysis of the interview data: relationships and graduate school. Study participants noted that relationships with a significant other, spouse, parents, extended family, friends, and mentors had a significant financial, emotional or professional impact on these emerging theatre artists. In addition to relationships, graduate school also emerged as a significant issue for study participants. The decision whether to pursue an advanced degree in the fine arts was based on financial and other considerations that were noted during their interviews. One additional factor was noted in an analysis of the interviews: alternative career. For one participant, pursuing an advanced degree led to a different career path. Three subthemes: (a) Relationships, (b) Graduate School, and (c) Alternative Career Path are discussed in the following section from highest to lowest percentages for each subtheme.

Relationships. About two thirds of the participants talked about how interpersonal relationships have impacted their post-college journey. Personal relationships emerged from the interviews as a significant factor in affecting the post-college transition experience for many participants. Personal relationships include significant others, spouses, family, and friends. Most of the participants who talked about their partners noted that their significant other was on a career trajectory outside of the theatre industry. Participants also noted that a significant other can provide a strong support system for individuals who adhere to erratic and demanding schedules as theatre artists. However, personal relationships can also put additional pressure on theatre artists, especially if their partner wants to pursue different career goals or living situations.

Austin related how moving to the Twin Cities was challenging because the decision to relocate involved his girlfriend, who was reluctant to move away from her home town:

Moving up here was a feat in and of itself because I moved up with my girlfriend at the time and she doesn't do theatre at all. And she, up until meeting me, has always wanted to stay in her home state all her life. So that was a little bit of a hurdle to convince her to want to do that. Eventually, she came around to the idea, because she realized there was literally nothing where we were at for me there.

Evan is in a supportive relationship with his girlfriend, but they both have different career paths that they want to pursue:

My relationship doesn't hold me back. We both certainly support each other. But just in casual conversations that we've had, she is an actress and wants to do film and has no interest in New York. But I'm like, oh, well, I'm glad to see that is so different from what I want. So that is something in the back of my mind.

Grant talked about how a demanding schedule with a nationally touring theatre company impacted his personal relationship:

It was a six-month tour and, basically, I would leave on a Friday and get home on a Monday. I was only home on weekends for six months. I wouldn't do it now, but it was great for somebody starting off. It's really hard if you are trying to maintain any sort of relationship, because I did move out here with my girlfriend. And even though she knew what I wanted to do, I don't think either of us was prepared for what a touring life was like.

For Teresa, meeting her significant other changed her priorities as a theatre artist and led to finding a more balanced lifestyle.

I didn't want to be away all the time. We bought a house. I have pets. So, it was like I definitely had to prioritize... I still do lots of theatre, but I had to decide would I rather travel, or would I rather be with these people who I really love and I really care about. And I was perfectly okay with saying, no, I am going to do theatre here. I am not giving up my dream. I'm not giving up things up for a man. It's just I really love somebody and I want to be here. And a lot of people think that's shameful. That no, you have to give everything up and all your connections must be lost so you can travel the world.

Luke also found that his significant other impacted his changing priorities as a theatre artist: “It made me realize that my relationship was way more important than any other job or career or life. And that was the first time in my life where I didn't put my career first and I put our sanity more importantly first.”

Jena talked about how her relationship impacted her decision to currently reside in the Twin Cities, but would like to consider other locations and professional opportunities in the future:

On a personal level, it would be hard to relocate because my partner works here and is really happy here and just bought a house here. So professionally I would love to go to other places eventually. But personally, I am here for a while. And that's okay, because there are so many theaters here that I haven't gotten to work for yet. Eventually I would consider moving away, but for the time being I'm here. I'd say at least five years.

A significant other can also provide financial support, as well as emotional support, for their artistic partner. Naomi talked about how having a financially stable spouse helped her “pursue her passions:”

I'm extremely blessed to have a partner who doesn't feel like I'm slacking off because of what I do... I don't know what my situation would be like if I wasn't connected to my partner with his job. I think I'd be having to compromise a lot more with the jobs I take during the day... if my husband ever decides he is done with his job, it would be a little bit different. Luckily my husband is a “normal” – what I call non-theatre people. So, he works a highly normal job that pays well.

Sarah talked about the surprise of finding that being in a relationship was a help rather than a hindrance in pursuing a career in theatre:

I have a significant other, but he's not in the way at all. He's very supportive actually. Which I assumed he would get in the way. I didn't really date in college and I didn't immediately after graduating. Then about a year after that I met my significant other, and I kept telling people, like, it's so unfortunate that I met this person, because now I have to contend with having this other person in my life that I don't have time for. But he's very supportive and his schedule is very flexible... We live together now, so when I'm running around – my schedule is that I work from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. six days a week – I can come home and he's like,

‘there's leftovers you can pack for your lunch tomorrow.’ I actually don't know how I would do my current schedule without having a significant other to pick up the slack for me. So that's helpful.

Conversely, Rachelle noted that having an unsupportive significant other negatively impacted her self-esteem. Rachelle talked about a former boyfriend who did not consider a theatre degree as “real” as other college majors: “He kind of put me down for having a theater major. Like, yeah, you have your degree, but it's in theatre, so it's not like a real degree... I think that took a toll on my self-esteem.”

Friends and family also had an impact on the study participants’ perception of support – both inside and outside the theatre community. Brett noted that the absence of having a strong theatre community made the transition into an acting career more challenging: “Friends-wise, my best friends in college were not theatre people directly... so that wasn't there for me.” Conversely, Vanessa talked about the benefit of having friends outside of the theatre industry:

Most of my close friends are not even theatre people or performing arts people, which I think is great. I mean people have friends in the same business, but I think as far as theatre goes, it's a lot more of that competitive, getting the parts, and things like that. For me, having stronger friends that are away from that is good for me.

Family relationships also played a role in the lives of the study participants. Oscar found that his parents continued to help him out with other kinds of responsibilities in his life: “I'm really fortunate there's a lot of things that I still don't do. Like, my parents take care of my taxes and stuff for me that I still don't know how to do.”

Rachelle noted that the pride her family has in her work as a theatre artist is not only a form of beneficial support for herself, but also for her extended family: “There have been a lot of setbacks for my family especially.” Rachelle talked about her responsibility as a role model to her family:

My family comes and sees things. My uncles are so proud of me. And it gives me a lot of pride when I hear them say they are just so proud of me... I always feel like I have this obligation to my family and to my community to make it as an actor. Because I feel like there are so many people who are looking up to me. Who see something as little as a commercial as so important and of so much value, that I feel like I have to just keep carrying that forward.

Graduate school. About half of the participants discussed graduate school as part of their professional plans. For many theatre artists, graduate school is perceived as the next professional rung by obtaining a Master in Fine Arts degree (MFA), which is considered a terminal degree in the performing arts. Many artists consider an MFA degree a conduit to more advanced opportunities as artists, including actors, and those in the creative fields such as playwrighting and directing. Obtaining an MFA degree is one way to create professional credentials, build a portfolio of work, and develop networking opportunities with well-connected individuals in the theatre industry. Competition is often fierce to get into prestigious MFA programs around the country, and applicants need to go through a strenuous audition process to obtain entry into the highest rated programs. It often takes several attempts to gain entry into a prestigious graduate program. In addition, an advanced degree in the arts often comes with a high price tag, and the additional burden of significant student loan debt is a big factor in the decision process.

The decision to apply to graduate school for the study participants considering graduate school was dependent on several factors, including a competitive application process, career timing, the perceived value of an advanced degree, and incurring additional student loan debt. The decision was also based on life logistics, such as relocation and the needs of their partners. Study participants talked about why they wanted to pursue graduate school. For Derrick, graduate school was always on his radar:

“I knew early on that I wanted to go to graduate school and get my MFA in directing.”

After coming to a crossroads with her directing career, Sarah applied to several graduate programs to see what her future options are: “I feel like I'm at a transition point, so I feel like I have to make a decision. I applied to grad school and I haven't heard anything yet, which is frustrating.” Grant also talked about moving his writing career forward with a graduate degree and relocating to another city:

I think I'm doing what I want to do, but I want to do more. I'm wanting to get into film or TV, so I recently went through a round of MFA auditions and I've been thinking about potentially moving to Chicago or New York... so that's why the decision to maybe get an MFA. Just thinking about what those next steps to getting there. I'm happy with where I'm at, but I still want to move my career forward.

Evan saw graduate school as a way toward his ultimate goal of having his own theater company one day:

I have this grand fantasy in my head for when I'm older. I start my own theater with my closest friends, so we could do our own work. But to get there, I would like to go to grad school, get the experience, and the network.

Paige described her own decision process to apply for a graduate program in directing:

In the coming next few years, I'm definitely going to start researching and applying for grad school. That's a strenuous process. They don't take very many people in the directing programs. It takes a few admissions cycles to get in. So, it's a very intimidating process, but it's kind of a requirement for jobs. A lot of the jobs that I search for are on the Internet. For a lot of them, if you want to be an associate artistic director, an MFA is almost always required.

For Rachelle, graduate school is something that is still on her radar, but getting an advanced degree is also slipping away as time passes: “I do want to go to grad school, and I feel like the longer I wait to do that, the more it's going to just go on to a back burner and be this thing that I wanted to do but never did.” Rachelle went on to talk about the beneficial connections that she could make in graduate school:

Part of the reason that I was thinking about going to grad school was to build more connections outside of the Twin Cities. I've known women who have been brought into the Twin Cities because of grad school connections. And I'm, like, that's a good way just to get to know people.

For an emerging theatre artist, the decision to apply to graduate school is often a balancing act with regard to finances, lifestyle, and the drive to succeed in their field.

Melissa stated:

As an actor, and where I want to be as an actor, the only thing that I can see is grad school right now. That's the position in my life I'm in. But then you get stuck in this vicious cycle of grad school costs money. Acting doesn't pay. Why would you pay to then not get it back?

Carolyn talked about the recent advice she received from her mentor in regard to pursuing a graduate degree. Her mentor stated:

'It is totally fine in your twenties to live like a cockroach and make no money and that's fine. But when you get to be in your thirties and beyond, you are going to want some sort of guarantee that you are making more money. And the way that you do that, in a lot of cases, is to go to grad school and to make those connections.'

Based on her mentor's advice, Carolyn stated: "And I was like, you're right. So, I ended up applying to three applications for graduate school." However, Carolyn also went on to state that leaving for graduate school may interrupt the connections she has already forged in the local theatre community:

I knew I wanted to go to grad school, but then I wasn't sure that now was the right time, because I am doing really well here, and I feel like I am starting to do the kind of work that I love doing. And I am making connections with people, so why would I take all of that and uproot myself and then go away for three years and then maybe move back, and then people are going to be, who are you?

Naomi noted that her decision to apply to graduate school is based on determining the value of an advanced degree, along with uprooting her current home life: "I'm figuring out if I want to get my master's or not. What I would get it in? And if I wanted to

go to some program somewhere, and what that looks like with a husband who's established here in Minnesota."

Alternative career path. Only one of the study participants decided to eventually pursue an alternative career path outside of theatre. Brett graduated with the intention of pursuing an acting career, but eventually moved on to getting his teaching certificate and master's degree. Brett stated:

I started coaching speech in high school right out of college, and that became something that I really liked doing. It wasn't a huge commitment, so I was still trying to audition for stuff at that time. And that became a good, creative outlet for me – working with students on their acting performances and writing... so that became a good outlet and reduced my desire to do theatre stuff... So, I started doing that and the next year I started grad school.

Brett went on to talk about how teaching was a better fit for him than acting for now:

I applied to grad school for teaching. It felt like a pretty natural thing. I think I also thought that teaching was a possibility, but I had never looked into it in the proper way, so I felt I had been avoiding it when it was perhaps an inevitability. So, the last two years I have been subbing and going to grad school and am about to finish my master's in teaching. So unfortunately, I had to go through two more years of school for it, and I wish I could have figured it out earlier... But I feel like it is a good fit for me for now, and a good fit for my skill set, too.

Third Theme – Discrepancies between Pre-Graduate Expectations versus Post-College Experiences

A third primary theme emerged from coding and analysis of the data collected during the interview process: Discrepancies between Pre-Graduate Expectations versus Post-College Experiences. One of the goals of this study was to determine if any discrepancies exist between expectations established in college versus the actual lived experiences of recent theatre arts graduates. The interview question: "Did anything turn

out differently after college than you expected in relation to your trajectory as an artist?” led the discussion across interviews. Follow-up questions included: “If yes, how did you feel/respond when things turned out differently than expected?” The participants’ responses provided insight into the transition experience between what these theatre arts majors expected their lives to be like at the time of college graduation, and what they actually experienced after being out of college between 1.5 and 3.5 years post-college.

Throughout the interview process, each participant was asked to reflect on their feelings at the time of graduation, as well as anticipated post-college plans, with a primary focus on their intended professional aims as theatre artists. Then participants were asked to share their actual post-college experiences in relation to their career as theatre artists and other relevant life factors. Finally, in an effort to better understand the post-college transition experiences in relation to any perceived discrepancies between what was anticipated at the time of college graduation and their actual experiences, participants were asked which actual experiences, if any, turned out differently from their initial expectations (plans and goals), experiences (career, finances, other factors), and how they responded to any perceived discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations and actual experiences (reactions). The following section explores participant responses in relation to discrepancies, expectations and experiences in the following three sub-themes: (a) Feelings and Career Expectations at the Time of College Graduation, (b) Post-College Career and Life Experiences, and (c) Discrepancies between Pre-Graduate Expectations and Post-College Experiences.

Feelings and expectations at the time of college graduation. Study participants were asked the following question: “What were your feelings at the time of graduation

and what did you expect your post-college life would be like as an artist?” Participant responses ranged from negative to positive expectations and emotions, and were often tied to their undergraduate experience, as well as specific plans they had in place at the time of graduation. Study participants’ responses in regard to their emotions at the time of college graduation are presented below from highest to lowest frequency for each section: (a) Negative Feelings, (b) Mixed Feelings, and (c) Positive Feelings.

Negative feelings. Across interviews, about half of the participants expressed negative emotions at the time of college graduation, including fear, anxiety, and trepidation about their next steps after college. The prospect of leaving college and uncertainty about their career path as theatre artists was a main contributor to negative feelings at the time of graduation and ranged from general anxiety to specific concerns about their future. Kyle noted that his main emotion was “fear.” He went on to say: “Because at that point I was still... I wasn't sure what I wanted to do next.” Rachelle stated that she was “nervous,” because she felt “a little unprepared for a theatre career.” Derrick described similar feelings: “Scared. Not really knowing, what to do next, you know?”

For Austin, leaving college was difficult because he had enjoyed his college years and his future was uncertain:

The main emotion I felt that day was kind of, like, somber, because honestly and truly I had loved my college, and going out I was just like, well, I got nothing. I have no plans whatsoever. And that kind of, like, went into the job search and everything, because I didn't get a job until September after college.

For Carolyn, her concerns were also based on leaving college behind with its structure and familiarity, and subsequently entering an unpredictable industry that did not provide a feeling of security:

I remember just feeling incredibly anxious all the time for those last few months... and I think I was feeling also on the edge of, like, I don't belong here anymore. I think I've matured past this. But also, I don't even know how to do anything other than school, because I have been doing school my entire life. I'm really good at it. I really, really like going to school and now I understand why people want to apply to grad school right away after college... It was a very fraught time. I think for a lot of people it is. I was feeling completely adrift, because I am very Type A and I really like having things planned, and this is, like, the worst career for that.

Faye shared similar feelings about leaving everything she had known up to that point in her life:

I was feeling a bit afloat. I didn't have any plans... It was kind of just, like, find work somewhere. So, it was scary, because the first 18 years up until that point I had never not done schooling, so it was – you go to college and you're, like, oh, I'm so independent now, but then you graduate from college and you're, like, wow, I'm really independent... so, it was pretty scary.

For Grant, it was the financial aspect of making a living as a theatre artist that caused concern. Grant noted that his feelings coalesced during his post-college preparation course right before graduation:

I just remember being scared and thinking, I'll never be able to pay for an apartment... I'll never be able to do all these things, or whatever, and I think I just went through that class very scared. And I think you can prepare people for that all you want, and I can know what an apartment costs, or I can know what a headshot photographer wants to see from you or whatever, but until you do it, it's just different... but even them telling me that, I still didn't know it would be fine.

The morning after graduation, Carolyn felt the reality of not having a specific plan in place for post-graduation:

I woke up and I was staring at the ceiling and I was like, oh my God, I have no plans for the rest of my life. I've never had no plans for the rest of my life. And I was staring into the void and I was like, am I crazy? Why did I choose to do this?

Mixed feelings. About a third of the participants expressed mixed emotions, such as “nervous,” “bittersweet,” and “panicky” among others. Heather felt her confidence in her career choice outweighed her concerns: “The confidence and the excitement and the

clarity of which I felt towards pursuing my goals outweighed the fear and anxiety.” Oscar noted that he felt: “Bittersweet, because I knew I would be leaving the area that I had known for four years. It was exciting. It was motivating. It was scary, I suppose you could say. But it was important.”

Vanessa had a combination of feelings, primarily dealing with a lot of anxiety about the future. Vanessa noted that there were a lot of good feelings and graduation was: “Definitely exciting. It's exciting to graduate. I think in the moment it's like, you know, I finally did it, it's done. So excited and happy.” However, along with those positive emotions, Vanessa remembered a sense of uncertainty about the future:

There was some kind of a little bit of panic, because I didn't have anything specifically lined up, whether it was in my field or not, right after school. So just a little bit of panic like, okay, now what? I've just spent the last however many years of my life in school, so what's next? How do I handle myself not being in school? Not going to class every day. So definitely some panic along with the excitement. Nervous. Definitely nervousness. Maybe a little bit of anxiety along with the panicky feeling.

Sarah was also anxious about not having a plan in place and feeling “definitely terrified” about her post-college life, even though she was confident in her skill set. Her feelings were further compounded by her perception that other classmates had things lined up, when she herself did not have anything in place at the time of graduation:

I was one of the only people graduating who didn't have some sort of plan. I knew that I was going to move to the Twin Cities, but I didn't know where I'd be or what I'd be doing. I had applied to a couple of internships, but internships for directing don't exist the same way they do for acting or design or development. So, I was a little afraid of, like, what I was going to be doing. But I also felt confident in my abilities, and I felt I was pretty done with college. I was pretty ready to move on... I was ready to move to a big city. I had never lived in a big city. So excited about that. Looking back, I was very naive about what it would take to be an artist in a city without a job or a plan or connections.

Brett, who wanted to pursue both acting and playwrighting, was also mixed on his

feelings at the time of college graduation based on his internship experiences and the skills developed in college:

I was ready to move on out of college. And slightly disheartened with my internship experiences, I would say, so I was sort of feeling bad about that and didn't really have anywhere to go with it that I felt right about. And then I think felt excited about moving on with my writing and having more time to write, I guess, and just opportunities what the level of college had given to me. So, I felt at least ready and decent and going out into the world with the skills I had developed.

Positive feelings. About a third of the participants related that they had positive emotions at the time of college graduation. These participants noted that they were, “confident,” “eager,” and “ready,” and that these feelings were tied to anticipation of the next stage of their life. Evan summed up his feelings at the time of graduation: “Eager, adventuress, curious, but ready. Certainly uncertainty. But by nature, I am a very adventurous person. I was never worried, I was just excited about what would come.” Paige summed her feelings up as: “Elated. Loved. Supported. Nervous. Just so much.”

Ivy noted that at commencement her emotions were positive because she was looking forward to the next stage of her life:

Joy, elation, anticipation and excitement... Because I knew that whatever happens next, it's going to be a wild ride. I felt kind of breathless, I don't know. It was just this moment, and everything stops, and you are like, wow, yeah.

Teresa was eager to move forward with her life because she had a summer job lined up: “By graduation I was like, I am ready to get out of here... let's go. Car packed, I have stuff ahead of me, and I am going to go work.”

Jena expressed similar anticipation for the next stage of her life based on her self-confidence and readiness for her future:

Confident in myself, just because I knew what I wanted to do. I've always been, like, take a leap and see what happens. So, I was just ready to close that chapter and just leap into the next one.

Expectations for post-college life. In addition to identifying their feelings at the time of college graduation, participants were also asked a follow-up question regarding post-college expectations for their life as theatre artists. Questions related to expectations included: (a) “At the time of graduation, what did you expect your post-college life would be like as an artist?” and (b) “Tell me about any plans or objectives you had for a career as an artist?” Responses across the interviews ranged from specific goals (e.g., auditioning, finding work, deciding on where to live, building a professional network, etc.) to a wait and see approach about their future life as theatre artists.

Career expectations at time of graduation. About two-thirds of the participants discussed specific plans that ranged from aiming for the penultimate “lights of Broadway” to a more pragmatic approach of finding theatre work locally. Heather noted: “My two dreams at the time were to be a Broadway musical stage manager and to stage manage the Oscars. Big award shows. Those were my dreams.” Conversely, Jena had a specific one-year plan after moving to the Twin Cities to see if a career in stage management would materialize:

I got here and I just hit the ground running. Just applying for things and meeting people and talking to people and just kind of getting myself out there. And I told myself I was going to give it a year and if nothing worked, I was going to move back and get a job at the bank that I worked all through college as a bank teller and figure it out from there. And it's worked out.

Paige gave herself a timeframe in her goal toward becoming a professional director: “My first goal out of school was that within the first six months of graduating to get paid to do theatre in any capacity. And I was lucky enough that that happened.”

Naomi also had a straightforward goal, “My plan was to audition. Audition, audition, and audition. I didn't have much of a plan beyond that.”

For Grant, his goal was more about long-range plans to establish a legacy as an actor and being able to support himself only through theatre work:

When I first got here, my plan was to take any acting job, paid or unpaid. And I guess my long-term plan was to just to be able to die and have people say, well, he was a great actor. And also to be able to support myself solely by acting, whether that's commercials, TV, stage, film, whatever. I didn't need to be on Broadway and I didn't need to be in Hollywood. I just wanted to support myself with just acting.

For others, their goals were less specific. For Oscar, his plans developed more organically: “I never set myself on a path outside of college. I wasn't like, here's what's going to happen. I kind of was, all right, I'm here and I'm going to go where I think my calling is.” Evan also became more fluid in his plans as things evolved after college:

I don't know if I ever knew what it was going to be. I wrote a list before college, a checklist. I still have it buried somewhere. It was, like, go to college, get a degree, go to New York, build a resume, get an agent, build a resume and then be in movies, etc. But then I got that internship in Minnesota which just took me to Minnesota, and certainly I am still building a resume here, but I don't know if I had any grand expectations. And if I did, I just thought okay, this probably won't happen yet. It's going to be a longer road than I thought.

Ivy noted that she wanted her career as an actor to evolve naturally based on where the job opportunities were, rather than based on specific expectations:

I was far more interested in what developed organically. I think there was always a small part of me that was maybe Broadway one day, but at the same time I don't know if I would like being on Broadway, just knowing the type of person I am. Maybe I'd stay in one area or do regional theater or fly around the country and do shows all over the place.

Luke viewed his career expectations through looking into the “unknown” and not being able to foresee the future of how his career would unfold:

I think the unknown is always the worst aspect of being an actor. I think that not knowing what your job is and how it's going to happen... I mean things are so

finicky, and casting is weird, and things get cancelled. I just think that the unknown is always terrifying. Especially at that time. I mean nowadays, it's a little less, but back then especially I could only see as far as my nose as what the future was holding. And despite that, I was constantly planning and planning, and I couldn't plan if I didn't know what was next.

Vanessa noted that her career expectations were tied to still determining the specific path she wanted to follow:

I guess I've always been one of those people that has always felt a little bit lost when it came to that... I kind of considered graduate school and that sort of thing, but I just never had an area that I was like, this is it. This is what I love to do. I love to act, or I love to direct, or I love to stage manage – anything like that. It's always been I kind of like a little bit of everything. And so... it was a struggle for me and it still is to try and figure out really where I fit into the world.

Experiences of post-college life. After discussing plans, expectations, and feelings at the time of college graduation, study participants were then asked if their career and life plans altered during their post-college transition. Specifically, interviewees were asked: “Did anything turn out differently after college than you expected in relation to your trajectory as an artist?” Participants were also asked: “Did anything turn out differently after college than you expected in relation to other aspects in your life such as finances, relationships, or other things?” Every one of the study participants found that their actual post-college experiences turned out differently in some respect than their pre-graduate expectations in regard to pursuing their careers as theatre artists, managing finances, and other additional factors they encountered during their transition to life after college.

Interviewees noted the challenges related to finding work in a highly competitive field, and the erratic lifestyle associated with working in the theatre industry. In addition, participants discussed how finances were more challenging than expected in order to meet cost of living expenses while pursuing a career as a theatre artist. Respondents also

talked about additional experiences in relation to other unexpected factors that they encountered during their transition to post-college life, including time management challenges and new skill set development. Participant responses were grouped into three areas: career, finances, and other factors, and are presented below in order from highest to lowest frequency.

Career experiences. Almost two-thirds of study participants noted that their career expectations were different from their actual lived experiences. The reasons for these differences were based on the challenges they encountered as emerging theatre artists, such as finding day jobs and theatre gigs, dealing with frequent rejection and high competition for theatre jobs, managing the challenges of relocating to a new city, and balancing new-found responsibilities and erratic work schedules.

Austin noted that finding any job was much harder than expected despite having earned a baccalaureate degree:

I honestly didn't think I'd end up in a fast-food job. All my life I have been told that going into a fast food job is the worst and that you can basically consider yourself a failure at that point, which is kind of harsh because I have met tons of people who are making it work for them, because that's all the options they have. And so, by that point I was pretty down in the dumps because I have a degree – why isn't that working? Everybody has a low point before they get to their high point, and I figure that was one of mine. I'm a lot more realistic in my thought process of what jobs I'm going to get.

Kyle also commented that his expectations for finding a day job after college was quite different than expected: “Very, very much so.” Kyle discussed the challenges of moving to a new city and finding a job:

When I graduated, I was pretty naïve, to be honest, in thinking that it wouldn't take me long to find a job. And then finding that things are not that easy... I thought, you know, especially with the Internet and everything, that it would be a lot easier to find a job in a different city. That's not really the case. So that was kind of the biggest thing – was finding a job and realizing how hard it is to find a

job. I foolishly thought I would be out of there in two months or three months. I ended up living with my mom for nine months.

Other participants noted how difficult it was to make a living as a theatre artist.

Paige noted the unexpected challenges of always having to find the next theatre gig: “I wasn't really prepared for you really have to constantly look for jobs. If you know what's next, you have to look after the one that's after that.”

Rachelle discovered firsthand how difficult life is for most people pursuing a career as a theatre artist right out of college and found that getting her first opportunities at the bigger theaters she aspired to work with was more challenging than expected:

I think, over the years, I've kind of come to a realization that it's not as easy as just getting your foot in the door. Just, like, a reality of the way theatre works over time has been the hardest thing. The reality of how hard it is to break into this market.

Grant talked about the unexpected challenge of finding consistent theatre work and the accompanying long periods without any gigs at all:

I keep going through these feast-or-famine periods where I am constantly getting cast in stuff and I feel I am on top of the world. And then month-long periods where nobody is calling me back. Either they are not calling me back, or there just aren't any plays that are the right fit for me. There was one year where I was working right into the next four or five plays that year. But right now, I haven't been in a show since September.

Melissa reflected on the irregular lifestyle of theatre gigs, balancing multiple jobs and rehearsals, and the value of a theatre degree:

I thought it would be much more steady, but also slower. I had an image of I would do a show, it would perform for a month, and then... I was thinking, okay, maybe I'll do three shows a year. Rehearse for a couple months, perform for a month, maybe have a week off and do the next one. And yet here I was, opening a show in one week, closing it the next week, and then opening the next show the next week while having overlapping rehearsals. Sometimes I would go from one rehearsal during the day to another rehearsal at night in shows I was making \$25 or nothing. I'll say there's part of me that will always wonder, would I have been better off going for it? Not going to college, just auditioning right away. Because

there are very few skills that I learned in college that I even think about using at all.

Teresa noted that getting acting work was more challenging than expected: “I should have been able to break into the Twin Cities theatre scene quicker.” Teresa further noted that one of the challenges she faced was high competition among female actors due to a gender imbalance for acting roles, and that finding gigs was especially difficult as a female artist in a city with a lot of roles going to men: “This city very much hires men... so many men. All the shows are ten men, one female. I know there are great men in this city, but they are all getting hired a lot because they are far and few between.”

Ivy also noted the challenges of breaking into the Twin Cities theatre industry as a female artist:

Yeah, I definitely thought it would be easier to break into the theater scene. More so than if I was to go to New York and line up with 700 other girls that looked like me. And to an extent it was. But at the same time, every time I go into an audition, especially for equity theaters, I get a sense that they don't really care that I went to a prestigious liberal arts college and that I am a thinker and that I will work hard. And it also doesn't help that there aren't a ton of roles for young women in their early twenties, and the ones that are available I just don't connect with. So that was kind of eye-opening.

For Vanessa, what was unexpected career-wise was not even getting a gig with a community theatre company after she had invested in a theatre arts degree:

I think it was the same as I expected in the fact that I knew, just knowing myself personally, that it was going to be a little bit hard for me to try and go for things. At the same time, it's been a little bit of a struggle for me to even get into the community theater world, where I feel like that's a little bit strange and off-putting to me. Where it's like, I went to school for theatre, but I am still kind of struggling to even get into community theater... So, it's been a little bit hard that way. Just to feel like I even belong in the world when it's... I don't know, I feel like it's just a lot of, like, just getting turned away versus actually being accepted to be a part of it. Which is hard.

Sarah found that some things were not a surprise: “I knew it was going to be difficult to start a directing career in the Twin Cities. And I knew it would be difficult to balance work and theater, and I knew I wasn't going to make a lot of money. So, in that regard, no, nothing has been surprising.” However, Sarah learned that her geographical location negatively impacted her trajectory as a director:

What I didn't know was that the Twin Cities – I don't if this is true everywhere, but the Twin Cities especially – directors and companies are the same thing. You are not ever going to be hired by a company to direct a show. Because it's an artistic director who does two shows a year, and that's their gig. So, if you want to be a director, you have to make those opportunities yourself... I wish somebody had said Minneapolis is great if you want to be an actor or a designer, because there are an abundance of opportunities for actors and designers. There are no opportunities for directors.

Though all of the participants indicated that their post-college life was different than expected to some extent and often not as hoped for, a few participants found that their careers unfolded better than expected. Naomi was able to get regular, paid acting gigs after college: “I am very surprised that I've managed to be involved in a show every season.” Jena also had a successful transition into a career as a stage manager:

Obviously when I first went to college, I never would have assumed that I would have been professionally stage managing. So, from my start of time at college it has turned out a lot differently. But from the time I graduated up until now, it's actually turned out better than I thought. I didn't really have a specific plan of how I was going to make a living as a stage manager, but it happened, and I've worked a lot and have been able to pay my rent from it. So, it's turned out a lot better than I ever could have imagined.

Teresa noted that she had a good survival day job that allowed her to pursue her “passion” as a theatre artist, which took longer to take off than expected:

I thought it was going to be kind of different... I would have thought I would have had to get another job... it's not something that I expected to happen at all. But I am so incredibly happy... Everyone's looking for a job like this – that is flexible, and you make your own schedule, and you take your own vacations, and you get paid what you want to get paid... Everyone dreams of that, and it really

takes my breath away thinking I get to have that in order to also pursue art whenever I want.

Heather found that a career as a theatre artist was not always a straight path, and that unexpected opportunities and detours occurred along the way:

Absolutely things turned out differently. Everything turned out differently. I think that I am very well aware of the fact that you have to work your way up in this field, for the most part. What I didn't anticipate – and I am someone who I have a goal and I just want to go specifically towards that – what I didn't anticipate is the veering... that staying on the path, but that it would twist and wind and veer back and do all of these different things. So, while I have not strayed from going after my goals, I have taken jobs and lived in places and met people that I never thought I would have. And I am grateful for all of those experiences... Doing things that I don't think are the next step up the ladder, but accepting there is a reason it's happening and I may not get a step up in my career, but I am going to meet someone or do something that will make me a more well-rounded person. So, when the opportunity does come to take another step towards my goal, I will be much more prepared for it.

Financial experiences. Beyond career challenges, about a third of the participants noted how finances turned out differently than expected and how difficult it was to make ends meet working as theatre artists. Unless they are working on an equity professional contract or receive a large stipend, actors and other theatre artists typically receive a limited stipend for each acting gig, which interviewees noted was not enough to pay for cost-of-living expenses. A few of the participants noted that they had family financial assistance that helped to pay for daily expenses, making it much easier to pursue a career as an emerging theatre artist. However, other theatre arts graduates in this study encountered the reality of financial challenges immediately out of college. Teresa talked about the concept of “starving artist:”

Art is really great, but we are artists. However, we are also business people... We don't want to think that this is for money, but I think there is no shame in talking about money. I think there is no shame in discussing how to make this work. We talk so much about the starving artist, and I'm like, then why don't we talk about

how to actually make it and actually talk about money. But everyone thinks it's too taboo, so they don't want to.

Melissa also found the reality of being a “starving artist” is harder than the romanticized version she received in college:

We all make jokes about how little actors make, but I don't think I understood the significance of what it really means to work 20 hours a week for six weeks and make \$50... And for many of us who don't have day jobs, what does it mean to work seven days a week... I think that the university that I went to perpetuated the idea of the poor starving artist and how romantic that idea was. And they made it seem like that was it. Like nobody was actually successful, was what they kind of made it seem like. Like this isn't a job, this is your passion.

Paige wished her undergraduate program had been “more stern and real about how hard it would be” in facing the reality of finances as a theatre artist after college.

Paige talked about taking unpaid internships as part of the reality of building a resume as a theatre director:

I just wish they were more real and frank about it. And what it takes. For these internships, nobody pays you... I had to pack up all my stuff and move to Minnesota and not get compensated. Only twice in all the shows that I've done have I been monetarily compensated, so I have to work three jobs, which is fine, but that's the reality. Or technically four jobs, because I work in theatre, too, but I don't get paid for that. So, it takes a lot to make ends meet when you're trying to pursue a career in theatre. Yeah, I wish they were a lot more real about, like, you're not going to get paid those first however many years. You shouldn't expect anything at all. Which is fine, but I just wish they would have been a bit more realistic about that.

Sarah found that one thing she was not expecting was that her peers from the Twin Cities with familial financial support had different professional advantages over her own situation as a recent transplant:

My director friends who have families here have not had the same difficulty getting their work done as I have, because they got to spend a year or two or five living at home where they don't pay rent. They don't have to pay for groceries, necessarily. They may contribute, but that means that any day job they have, all of that money just goes into a fund for producing their next show. And I probably would have produced as much as I did in college if I could afford to, but you know, I don't just have \$2000 to do a show, much less rent a space for \$5000 or

whatever it is now. So, I knew it was going to be expensive to do theater in the Twin Cities, but I didn't know that there would be people who would have an advantage because of where they're from.

Grant described the unexpected challenge he encountered regarding finances and job choices, and how they affected his personal relationship:

Much of the past two years or so, me and my girlfriend have been pretty stable. It does make things iffy and scary when I've had to quit a job, or especially when I've had to tell her, my girlfriend: 'Hey, I know we need the money, but I'm going to quit this job and take this other lesser paying job.'

Other factors. About a third of the participants talked about additional factors beyond career and finances that turned out differently than expected. These included unexpected career changes, time management issues, development of new skill sets, and finding support from community and professional networks.

Teresa expected that she would be working numerous, lucrative acting gigs with traveling cruise lines, but after one tour, she changed her perspective:

I didn't think I would just be in one place. I thought I would do more tours. I thought I would do more travelling around. But after one... I did an eight-month cruise. There is no phone. There is no Internet. You don't have any family there. It's a great job, but it's really, really hard. And after I finished that, I had made so much money that I just felt like I'm going to use this instead to be in one place... So, it was definitely a change of perspective. I was like, I just don't need to do that again. That was enough of a challenge once and it was hard, because I will never make that much money again in my life.

Faye found that managing her time and learning about networking as a theatre artist was much different on her own than when she was in college:

In college, I considered myself very good at time management, but it's a whole different ballgame with that once you graduate, so that's something I have had to work on. Figuring out how to get jobs, because so much of it is who you know, and it's like if you don't know a lot of people, what are your next steps.

Melissa found that she was not prepared for how many hours she would have to put in to balance a career in theatre with multiple jobs and rehearsal schedules:

My New Year's resolution every single year since graduation has been to have one day off a week. And I have never been able to achieve it. And that was something I was not expecting. They tell you the myths of, you know, you get Monday nights off and you get weekends off until you're performing. That's not real... You just never know when you'll get cast or when you won't get cast. So, making that investment has... I don't want to say it's scared me to the point of stagnation, but I'll say I haven't looked at it in a realistic way.

More positive aspects of a life as a theatre artist were discovered by a couple of participants. For Naomi, developing new skill sets was an unexpected surprise:

Stumbling into teaching artistry was definitely something that was different than I expected. And I even assistant-directed. So, doing things that I never wanted to do and that being part of the full theatre experience. I'm still an actress, but I can direct some. I can teach. Just because I'm being involved in other aspects of theatre doesn't mean I've given up on my acting. Finding that I had these skills that I'm getting paid to use that I didn't ever think that I would be paid to use.

Building a community of support and professional networking helped a couple of the participants and was an unexpected aspect of their post-college transition experience.

Oscar talked about how he was able to tap into a community of support with people from his former college and other theatre artists that share a similar journey:

One thing that was very different is that you forget the fact that you forget how many people support you. In the university you have the safety net of your advisors. Your professors are there, and there are so many people out there that you think, hey, if any moment I need to call or contact those people and say I have a question about this, that I know they will be there. I was so surprised to see that the safety net is still kind of there with you... I think that is important to have that feeling of safety in a world where you feel that you are kind of alone now. You are a much smaller fish in a much larger pond now, but there are a lot of things out there that will help you to succeed as long as you look for them... so that was definitely different than I thought. I didn't feel as isolated as I thought I might have felt or thought I was going to feel when I left college. There a lot of people in the same boat or who have been in the same boat as you and they want you to know that you are not going to sink.

Heather also talked about the unexpected theatre job opportunities that came through recommendations and building a professional network.

It's all been through people telling me there is a job available. Recommending me. In the fates – whatever you believe in – falling into place, I guess. But I think it's primarily been all about networking. I will have one job, and then someone from that job has recommended me for another thing, and then it's just bounced around like a pin ball in that way.

Discrepancies between expectations versus experiences. About half of the study participants commented on the perceived discrepancies between their pre-graduate expectations and actual post-college experiences as emerging theatre artists. The question asked of interviewees regarding discrepancies between expectations versus experiences was: “In relation to pursuing a career as an artist, how did you feel/respond when things turned out differently than you expected?” Participants talked about changing perspectives and expectations based on their post-college transition experiences. The perceived discrepancies between what interviewees thought would happen at the time of college graduation and what they actually encountered in their life after college led to a variety of psychological reactions and tangible actions taken to address their post-college experiences. Participant responses noted the following discoveries: learning how long and hard it takes to establish yourself as a theatre artist, the emotional toll of constant rejection and stress related to a career in theatre, readjustment of personal goals and perspectives, and taking different approaches to manage their new reality. Participant responses are presented below in order from highest to lowest percentages.

When Kyle realized the ongoing challenge of finding any kind of work after graduation in order to support himself before pursuing his goals of acting and directing, his outlook became one of “dread” as he faced his new reality: “Just kind of melancholy. Just kind of like, you know, this is what my life is now, I have to make money, I have to try and get by. I'm not making enough, so I need to find another job.”

Grant found that the challenge of starting out as a professional actor led him to compare himself to other more successful theatre artists:

I'm not sure what I expected. I mean I expected it to be very hard and it was. The very first play I was in here, I had a couple of lines and I played the henchman... Yeah, I guess I didn't know too much what to expect, because I had a hard time... I would see celebrities who were my age or younger and doing work that I would love to be doing. But then I was like, well okay, but they were also Ron Howard's daughter, or this person's son, or they were born right on the street of this theater, or whatever. So I didn't try to compare myself to those types of people. I didn't really have a good knowledge of what I should be comparing myself to. And also, I thought that even people that are my age, a lot of the people I was running into actor-wise, they were born and raised here. They grew up here. For me, at least, I felt I was really hungry for it and a lot of people that were born and raised here, I felt, took it for granted that they had such an amazing theater scene. Where I come from, there's nothing, pretty much.

Rachelle similarly found that pursuing a life as an actor was more challenging and taking longer than expected, and led to a feeling of urgency that time is running out to meet her career goals:

It's a lot harder than I thought it would be. It's kind of disappointing. I feel like I need to have a better plan the older I get. And maybe I shouldn't feel this way, but I feel like as a woman, my time is more limited than it would be as a man. And so, I'm like, okay, you only have so much time to make it before you age out of the things that you would be called in for. So, I do feel kind of more of a pressure to make things happen for me far quicker than I think I'd probably would feel like if I was a man. Especially if I want to see my end goal of getting into film and tv.

Though Luke was able to find steady work as an actor, he also encountered an unexpected level of stress with navigating an ongoing cycle of trying to balance both his day job and acting gigs:

It was great most days, but it was also stress inducing and exhausting. I was wondering, how can I teach, but also perform and bring them the best that I can? I was, like, this is just not what I expected. I was stressed out because... what happens if I don't have a job for two months and I'm just teaching? Is that going to be enough money to pay the rent? Is that going to work? Am I going to be too tired going to so many auditions? How am I going to navigate this?... I don't want

to say the word “depressed,” because I wasn't depressed. I didn't feel like I was exhausted, or tired, or hurt, or feel like the world was dragging me down. I just felt very overwhelmed by the idea of where is this going. What am I doing? How am I actually going to do this? Am I going to survive? Am I going to live through this?

Evan came to realize that his dreams may not be realized in the original way he had hoped for and how his perspective has changed in regard to his career goals:

I think I reconciled with myself last year, and the year before, that I probably won't be famous. Probably not going to be a household name. Probably won't be at the Oscars one day. I can't rule anything out, but then I was like, I'm going to go to the Actor's Studio. I'm going to do this. I'm going to get into movies. People still ask me about movies, and my family, but I'm like, well, that's not where my path has taken me. Because I have done so much work in the theatre, and that's just what is near to my heart and this is where I belong. That other stuff can come, if it does.

Ivy found that the lack of and female roles was an unexpected challenge as an emerging actor in the Twin Cities and that has changed her perspective on her career expectations:

There was a lot of frustration. And there still is. There is a lot of frustration there and a little bit of anger. Mostly because it should be easier for roles like that to pop up... So just lots of frustration, and anger, but also determination... I don't feel as young and starry-eyed. I feel much more grounded in reality about what to expect, and I accept there are flaws, but I also have plans to change them.

Brett talked about the discrepancy between his expectations and resulting experiences in relation to still being attached to the theatre industry, even though he decided to embark upon a different career altogether when his plans to pursue a theatre career did not take off as planned:

I kind of just feel like I could go back, honestly. I feel like I am not that far away from it. I still feel like I am still cultivating theatre and working with actors and don't feel so far from it. I see enough theater and pay enough attention to it that I feel like I am there and could go back. But I do feel like someone who could have had a chance if the supports had been there.

Paige realized that with applying for directing jobs, she dealt with: “All the rejection. It’s awful and that was a scary thing.” In response, Paige adopted a strategy to deal with the constant rejection from prospective theatre companies:

I had just gotten rejection letter after rejection letter after rejection letter. I even got four in one day. So, I went back home. I am very much the type of person where it's, okay, what do we have now in front of us? How do we pursue this goal a little further every day? I've emailed every theater in the Twin Cities in order to get work. And yeah, that's worked maybe three or four times, but that's not a lot coming back to you... So, I applied for a few more. Just kind of desperate at this point. And then I got a call and it was for an artistic director's assistant... So, with the rejections, there's a very specific way you have to deal with them, and I feel like as an artist, that can really make or break you. I've found that I've been quick to adapt to that. Sometimes you just have to let yourself be sad for a day, and then be, okay, we'll put out five more applications tomorrow.

Austin also realized that he had to change his methods for finding work as a theatre artist:

When I first moved up here, I had no idea how to find an audition... I am a lot more different in the fact that I am just going out there and being more aggressive in trying to get whatever I can get, rather than not doing anything. So that is one of the big changes I have seen from myself in college to myself now... that is one of the bigger things that I'm still working on as an artist, because it is a little different when you are out on your own, I will say that much.

Sarah found that managing her day jobs was more difficult than expected in that she had to switch out different “survival day jobs” on a regular basis to align with her erratic schedule as a theatre artist:

I found I do have to have a job that is flexible enough that you can go to working a day show to working a night show, and switching back and forth, or you just have to quit your job every three months. So that's difficult.

Heather found that her career path was not a straight line, but often a winding road that led in unexpected job directions, including leaving a job much sooner than expected in order to keep herself on track with her career goals:

It was very frustrating. It hit me almost immediately after I graduated. And what I have learned is that I can veer off so far, but when I surpass that point, I have to do something to get back. So, I took a job and it wasn't what I thought it was going to be. And because I have so much self-worth and happiness tied to what I do, the option that I felt was the best one at the time was to leave that particular job. So, I did it for a significantly shorter amount of time than I wanted to and then hopped back on the train. And trusted that getting back into putting myself on the tracks would be the option for me, even though I didn't have anything lined up at the time.

Fourth Theme – Artist Identity: Then and Now

Theatre arts majors are commonly labeled as “artists” in the theatre industry. However, each individual has his or her own interpretation of how the label of “artist” is defined and to what degree they personally identify as artists. In the context of this study on the post-college transition of theatre arts majors, having a greater understanding of how each participant viewed their identity as a theatre artist may help the reader to understand the unique challenges of theatre arts graduates compared to other career paths. In this section, the concept of “artist identity” was explored through the lens of personal and career identity, based on an analysis of the data that emerged across interviews in this study.

For the purposes of this study, artist identity is defined as how one thinks of one’s personal identity in relation to their career as theatre artists. It is important to note that in this study, artist identity may be perceived differently between those individuals who identify as actors (who perform on stage) versus those individuals who identify as “creatives” (those who work off-stage, such as stage managers, directors, and costume designers, etc.). However, since these career paths intersect closely with one another, it is fair to assume that identity in relation to their career paths impacts almost all participants in this study, as the findings in this section support.

Artist identity was explored during the interviews through the following interview questions. Participants were asked about their artist identity after discussing their undergraduate experiences. At that time, participants were asked the following questions: “How did you feel about your identity as an artist at the time of college graduation?” Later in the interview, after discussing their post-college experiences and perception of any discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations and their post-college experiences, participants were asked: “How do you feel about your identity as an artist now?” This question was followed by: “Has your perception of yourself as an artist changed at any time between college and now?” Participants were also asked: “When you think about being an artist, tell me about specific experiences or situations that have typically influenced how you perceive yourself as an artist?” Participants’ responses to these questions regarding artist identity were grouped into two categories: (a) Artist Identity at Time of College Graduation, and (b) Artist Identity Post-College. Various sub-themes emerged from an analysis of the data conducted across interviews for both categories. Responses are presented below based on highest to lowest frequency in each category.

Artist identity at time of college graduation. Study participants were asked to reflect back to the time of their undergraduate years and discuss how they viewed their identity as artists at the time of college graduation, at the point between having gone through their theatre arts major and as they prepared to embark on their post-college life. An analysis of the data collected during interviews revealed three sub-themes that emerged in relation to artist identity at the time of college graduation across interviews of study participants: (a) Seeking Validation, (b) Realization of Artist Identity, and (c) Level

of Confidence. Participant responses for each of the three sub-themes are presented below from highest to lowest percentages across interviews.

Seeking validation. About a third of the study participants discussed how their artist identity was impacted both positively and negatively during their undergraduate years. For a few participants, positive validation of their identity as artists arrived in the form of positive feedback from professors and mentors. For a few other participants, a lack of validation was due to self-perception of how others viewed the label of “artist” in a negative light.

For Ivy, who was undecided between pursuing directing and acting, her identity solidified based on a respected professor’s comments about her ability as an actor. Ivy stated:

I remember after one of the classes sitting with my professor and she just said, ‘You’re an actor. You have a better eye for acting than directing.’ And that was the first moment that I had someone validate that feeling for me. I think I always secretly had it, but through years of people telling me, no, you’re not going to make it, you’re not good enough to be a leading role on stage, to have someone that I respected look at me and say, ‘No, your heart is right. This is something you could do if you wanted.’ So that’s kind of what it was. It changed me. It opened my eyes a little bit more for possible things I wanted to do with my life.

For Rachelle, she needed external confirmation by someone she trusted to feel she had the right to call herself an actor:

For a while I didn’t even feel I could call myself an actor, but I was, like, you have a degree in theatre and that’s what you want to do. So, I was calling myself an aspiring actor. And one of my mentors – she was an instructor for me – then took me under her wings after college. She was like, ‘You have to quit calling yourself an aspiring actor.’ She said, ‘You are an actress, you’re doing work.’

Paige struggled with self-confidence in her family life, but eventually found greater confidence in her identity as an artist during her college years. However, Paige initially struggled with “imposter syndrome,” where she did not feel she could honestly

claim a right to her identity as an artist:

When I was in college, everyone kept telling me you're so good at this. Where within my home life, like 18 years previous, some relationships in my family have definitely made me feel less than and not good enough. Not smart enough. So, to have lived through that for 18 years and then all of a sudden be, like, oh my gosh, you're the greatest, I felt like a sham. I felt like people don't know the truth that I'm actually not good enough. I totally felt like an imposter. And it wasn't until I had a really deep conversation with a professor of mine that she was like, 'It's okay to be scared and fearful. That's actually good because it means you care about it. That's a good thing.' Because for me throughout my life, fear had always paralyzed me, where with some people it drives them. And so, I really had to learn to power through that fear in order to really discover, oh, I am good at this... it took a lot for that bulb to flash. And even now in my career right now it takes a lot to realize, oh yeah, I am kind of good at this. Because even now I still feel like that abandoned kid who wants to be in theatre, but feels like she can't be.

Melissa described how her sense of artist identity was both challenged by a negative undergraduate program experience, but also validated by an inspiring professor:

I would say my identity as an actor was challenged, fought against, beaten down, judged. But I got to reclaim it with that last professor. And I don't mean to, like, put her on a pedestal or anything, but seeing her being a professor and a full-time actor was inspiring. And she used that word. She called us actors. And it just felt right again... I would say, to some degree, I was an actor in spite of my program. They tried to take it away from me and I wouldn't let them. And I don't want to seem really negative or bitter, but this is just how I feel.

A couple of the study participants felt their identity was invalidated based on negative perceptions about theatre artists from public perception, such as minimizing the value of being an artist. At the time of college graduation, Carolyn felt that her identity as an artist was something that people would devalue if she called herself an actor: "I feel like people won't take me seriously when I say that, because there are people who want to go be doctors and they think that's better than what I'm doing." Grant also had a difficult time with the concept of identifying with the label of "artist" based on the negative connotations he brought with him before he even started college:

For some reason, ever since I was younger – and I think it has to do with mainly the conservative, hick town I came from – there was something about being called an artist that just seemed very frou-frou and very weak, I guess, if you want to call it that, and that got planted in my head. So as much as I liked being an artist, I didn't like to be called one. So, to me I kept thinking of it as, well, I'm not performing art, I'm doing a craft. And I think I was probably not saying it out loud, but at least to myself I was very snobbish about the whole thing. So, I think that differentiating between calling it a craft or calling it art made me feel more comfortable to call it one rather than the other.

Realization of artist identity. About a third of the study participants noted that they came to a realization about their identity during their undergraduate years, based on considering alternative career paths, exploring different creative tracks, and a strong conviction that their identity was as an artist all along.

For a few participants, their identity as artists was something that was established prior to entering college. Evan stated: “I knew I wanted to be an actor since I was 15 in freshman year of high school. I never really doubted it and never had any back up plans. I just worked hard to do that.” Brett’s specific artist identity changed from when he started college to when he left college regarding the theatre track he wanted to pursue: “I think I thought of myself as an actor primarily going in. And by the time I graduated I definitely saw myself primarily as a writer.” For Carolyn, who initially considered alternative career paths before entering college, her strong sense of identity as an actor was solidified during her college years: “I was like, who am I kidding? I need to keep doing this. This is the thing that makes me the happiest.” Carolyn also noted that her identity as an artist was further solidified by her mentor recommending that she should pursue additional training after college: “And that was a mind-blowing moment of transition for me. To realize, oh, this is it. This is really, really it for me.”

Melissa also discussed the importance of her identity as an actor: “The word actor for me is really important, because I think it solidifies an identity of I want to be the one telling the story... I knew what the general public understands an actor to be, and that's what I wanted to do.”

For Oscar, his identity was built on proving his value to himself and to others:

I kind of felt when I graduated that I always wanted to feel that I wanted to prove something to either me or other people around me. There was always this kind of, like, I'm here and I want to show you why I'm here.

Austin reflected on his decision to major in theatre and how that tied into his identity at the time of college graduation:

I guess I left knowing it was always going to be hard, but the reason I chose to go with this one was not because I was lazy and only had three more classes to get the major for it and only ended up being a theatre arts major. No, I always kind of had this idea that I was going to be in the arts no matter what. Because no matter what, I can see myself in the arts. I can't see myself in literally anything else. So, I took that as, well, you know it's going to be hard, but this is the only place you can see yourself in, so keep going until you get it.

Level of self-confidence. About a third of the participants noted that the level of self-confidence they had in their ability as theatre artists impacted how they felt about their identity as artists at the time of graduation. Participants gave a variety of reasons that impacted their confidence-levels at that point in their lives, including undergraduate program experiences, faculty input, internship opportunities, and changing perspectives in relation to identity.

Sarah's undergraduate experience as a theatre arts major solidified her identity as a director with a high level of confidence by the time she graduated:

I saw myself as a director, and I was very confident in my abilities. There were a lot of students in my year interested in directing, and not only were we a big class, but it was a lot of students who really, really wanted to direct. But there was never any question that I was not necessarily the best person in the department, or

anything like that, but that I had nothing to fear in terms of competition. Everybody else who wanted to direct was just as talented as I was, but they certainly were not any more talented than I was. And I think a lot of that was because I was able to create my opportunities, and I got a little bit of support from faculty members. So, I felt like – between the training I had gotten in classes and the training I had gotten myself – I felt pretty confident I had some pretty special or unique abilities or something by the time I graduated.

Paige noted that her self-perception as an artist changed dramatically over the course of her undergraduate years based on increasing confidence in her ability as a director. By the time Paige graduated, she viewed her identity as: “Completely different, as any one does through their college experience during those four years.” Paige went on to talk about the change from a freshman lacking in confidence to a confident senior knowing what she wanted to pursue:

For me, when I was a freshman and walking in, the whole time during the first few days I was thinking how did I get here? Why did they let me in? This is crazy. To eventually, finally at the end understanding why they accepted me... They look for people with potential who are these diamonds in the rough. So that's why they said yes. Compared to when I was a freshman, I was just thrilled they let me into the room. To be in a place where theatre gets made. I was excited to even just drill a hole in scenery. Compared to my senior year, where especially in my studies I knew that not only did I want to be a director, I wanted to be an artistic director of a regional theater.

Heather found that her identity as a stage manager also grew over time during her college years based on positive experiences during her undergraduate program, including an exceptional internship experience:

In school, I was confident knowing what I wanted to do, and feeling like I was doing something right, because I was always happy doing it... so my sense of identity in this industry skyrocketed. Because from my study abroad experience I got all sorts of confidence, and my eyes opened to the world and what it takes to fend for yourself in the world as an adult. And then I went onto my internship and I thrived there. So, I got a ton of positive feedback and made tons of great friendships and networks. I kind have just been growing ever since. And then graduating. That is a whole other identity rocker. But I just kind of kept growing.

Jena talked about her confidence in her decision to pursue stage management,

despite still developing her skill set at the time of college graduation. Jena noted that it also helped to have theatre job lined up at the time of graduation:

I knew I wanted to stage manage. I am super confident in that. I wasn't super confident in my abilities at that point, because I knew that stage managing in college and stage managing in the real world were two very different things. But I knew I had it in me somewhere. I just needed to get out in the real world and kind of sink into it and figure it out. I also knew upon graduation that I had a job lined up with a summer stock company as the production stage manager. So, I knew that even though I don't really feel ready and I don't necessarily feel super confident as a stage manager, I know that I have this summer experience that is going to prep me well for when I make my move to Minneapolis and start working there. So, I felt pretty confident in myself upon graduation. It was just a matter of kind of refining those skills a little bit and getting more experience.

Teresa had a more philosophical outlook about her identity as an artist and talked about how the positive side of learning to “fail” gave her confidence for the next stage of her life by the time she graduated:

I think leaving high school, we are all just driven by passion and nothing else. We think we can be anything. And then throughout college it became clear to me. I think my artistic motto and identity became: know your limits, but challenge yourself. And that was definitely not something that I thought in high school, because we all just think we can do anything. And it is just a hard balance, because in college you are pushed as far as you can. The point is to fail a lot. And I guess that, too, was something that really became a part of who I was as an artist – saying that risk and failure is not a bad thing at all. And it made me feel after college that I could fail at things and that would be okay.

Artist identity post-college. Study participants were asked to reflect on their concept of artist identity at two points in their lives: (a) at the time of college graduation, and (b) at the time of their interview for this study. After discussing their artist identity at the time of college graduation, interviewees were then asked about their identity as artists currently, after having experienced their post-college transition to date as theatre artists. An analysis of the data collected during interviews revealed five sub-themes that emerged in relation to post-college artist identity for study participants: (a) Pursuing Their Calling,

(b) Changing Perspectives and Priorities, (c) Comparing Self to Others, (d) “Artist” as Labeling, and (e) Identity as Artist of Color. Participant responses for each of the five sub-themes are presented below from highest to lowest percentages across interviews.

Pursuing their “calling.” About a third of the participants noted that at the time of their interview, they currently had a positive sense of artist identity due to pursuing artistic work that they enjoy, in combination with feeling a sense of purpose and connection to their work as theatre artists. Participants described their feelings in relation to pursuing a career as theater artists with descriptors such as: “fulfilling,” “my calling,” “self-sustaining,” and “the best version of me.”

Ivy described how she found a sense of connection with her work as an actor that she had not found before: “This is the first time I've heard of a job description that made me feel comfortable, you know? That moment felt like everything clicked into place. It felt comfortable, it felt new, but at the same time, like, something I've always known.” Kyle shared similar emotions and “elation” for his work as a theater artist: “I feel like I've found my calling.”

Luke noted that even through his worries about making it as an actor, he always felt confident that he was an artist:

Even through my fear, I always identified myself as an actor and as someone who could perform very well... I could sing, dance, and act and do all these things. It never left me, I just think that I took it... I don't want to say less serious, but... yeah, I guess I never really lost that identity, my identity as an artist.

Jena stated that: “I identify as a freelance stage manager. That's what I tell people that I do. Every time I stage manage a show, I just think, yep, this is what I want to be doing and this is what I think I'm good at.” Jena went on to describe how fulfilling her work is to her: “I wake up in the morning, every morning, and I'm really excited to go to

rehearsal, to go to tech, to prep my next script, to look for more stage management work. I'm just excited about it.”

A few participants felt strongly that they are at their best when they embrace their identity and work as artists: Heather, another stage manager, noted that:

I think that when I am stage managing, I've always felt that's me. The best version of myself. I'm using all of my strengths in one job, which I think is very unique to have found that at such a young age, if at all.

Kyle also found that working as a theatre artist is where he is most comfortable and noted that: “This is something I am talented in... this is the first thing that I've ever done that felt that I was naturally good at... I felt like I found something that I could attach myself to.” Kyle went on to say that:

Director, stage manager, acting. Those are my identifiers. Kind of through all that I discovered who I was, where I'm comfortable, and who I'm comfortable with, and then what I really what I want to do with my life.

For Naomi, acting is a need that is integral to her very essence and a vital part of her identity as a theatre artist:

There was a period of time, a year, where I was not involved in any theatre production. And I got depressed. And I think that was a huge part of identifying who I am as a human – that I need to be an actor. It is self-sustaining. I can't stop. And so, going in it was like a feeling of, like, I need to do this. I need to act. Not necessarily anything more specific than I need to act. I need to be involved in this. And so, I think in the end of the process, I was still, I am, an actress who needs to act.

Rachelle shared similar feelings on her identity as an artist and pursuing her passion, despite the challenges of being an actor:

I don't want at the end of my life to be like I spent 20 years of my life doing something I hated. Which is why I'm an actor now. Because that's the one consistent thing that I love no matter what. And if I die and don't make it as an actor, or I'm not the most successful actor that ever happened, at least I can say that for the entirety of my life, I did something that I love and I enjoyed, despite how challenging it was or despite how disappointed I was. As long as it makes me

happy. And I'm always happiest when I'm acting.

Changing priorities. About a third of the study participants discussed their changing perspectives and priorities in relation to their identity as emerging artists. Participants' evolving perceptions were tied to changes they had experienced over the course of their transition from college based on where they wanted to spend their time and resources, moving from an idealistic to more pragmatic viewpoint, and their changing lifestyles and responsibilities.

Melissa's identity as an actor changed since college graduation based on where she wanted to spend her time and effort as an artist:

As far as my identity, I think I do kind of carry it with me... I think it has gotten stronger since I graduated. I'm proud to say I'm an actor... But, I feel like I've had to prevent myself from doing things that I think I'll fail at, because I don't want to expend the resources, the time, the energy, the money, or spend time printing a resume or printing a headshot to pursue things that I don't want. Like maybe now my idea of an actor is much smaller than what it used to be... I want my identity as an actor to be doing things that I believe in.

Teresa's perspective on her identity as an artist has changed to a more practical view of the work she does:

I guess I don't do art for art's sake very much anymore, which is kind of sad, but I feel like with the opportunities I've been given, it's been a job. And I've kind of changed my viewpoint from I'm doing theatre because of art, all the time... Instead it is more like those are really the unique, special moments when you get to do a show that has a meaning above just I'm doing a job. And I still love my jobs. I still love them and am still so thankful that I get to do that for a living, but they don't hold deep artistic meaning for me. I don't hold onto them and go, oh, remember that show... I just take things a little more pragmatically.

Ivy described how her identity as an artist became more realistic over time based on her experience interacting in a non-theatre-oriented world:

I think because I have not been doing a ton of shows, sometimes when I say to people who are not in the theater community, I'm an actor, people always say, "When is your next show? When is your next project?" Because they don't know

things ebb and flow. And I mostly now interact with people who are not in the theater scene, so there are some days that I feel challenged in my definition of myself as an artist. But then there are times where I feel, no, that's still who I am. I may be a little more jaded, but I do feel that my eyes have been opened a little more. I feel a little more realistic about my expectations and it doesn't feel as new and exciting to me to say I'm an actor. It feels more like a statement of fact that has yet to be proven.

A few participants talked about how their lives outside of theatre impact their perspective in relation to their identity as theatre artists. Evan talked about his struggle with which path he wants to pursue – a life as a theatre artist, which he has pursued since high school, or a more stable, non-theatre lifestyle that could lead to other things he wants in life:

I've been thinking a lot lately, almost three years after I left, at what point then does it become my acting? If I want to be an actor, then does that become a hobby that I do at nights and on the weekends? Because I have this day job to support me, I don't need the acting to support me, honestly. I could settle here and I don't have to act, but then am I an actor? It's a weird thing... So, I'm still thinking like what I truly want to do. If I want to be a full-time actor and stay where I am at right now, but maybe eventually, one day, grad school, New York, whatever that next step is. Because I think the Twin Cities is a great market to be an actor and have a stable home life, but do I want the house and the kids and the family, or do I want to be a full-time actor, which is kind of a gypsy life... I think that because this is what I've always known this is what I wanted to do since I was 15, suddenly the idea of not doing it is a little scary, and I guess that is more tied into my identity than I realized. Just a lot of what do I want.

Sarah struggles with the concept of identifying as an artist when little time is spent on pursuing her work as a director and playwright, and most of her time is consumed by other life responsibilities in order to pay her bills:

I feel a little behind. I feel like I should have – I should be at a point where I'm producing like a show or two a year, and I'm not. I'm producing a show, like one show every other year, and then picking up little gigs in the middle. And that's frustrating. Like if a person says to me, what do you do, it's hard for me to answer. Because on one hand I teach, and that takes up 90% of my brain space and what pays my bills and where I spend most of my time. Whereas if I tell somebody, oh, I'm a theatre director, they say great, what are you working on? Well that's a very complicated... it's like, well, I'm kind of writing this play. But

I've kind of been writing this play for two years, and as soon as I can get a day off, I'll finish it. So, it's kind of hard to identify as an artist when most of your time and money is wrapped up in something else. But I do not feel that I am any less capable.

Comparing self to others. About a third of the participants talked about comparing themselves to peers and other artists, and how that impacted their level of confidence and ability as artists. Participants talked about their perceptions of success, failure, and personal experience tied to their sense of identity as artists.

Derrick talked about identity as an artist in relation to his perception of his career trajectory compared against his peers and more established artists, and how he felt he came up short in comparison:

Whenever I meet fancy older people who are far more talented than I am, I always look at my resume. Am I doing it right? I don't feel that I am, but that's just because no one ever feels that they're, you know, the best. I see young people who are my age who are far more successful or whatever. And with that you always have to look at yourself and then what you're doing... and not compare yourself to other people. That's always challenging, I feel, especially among young people, because we are always trying to be seen, be heard. Have a place among these very older talented people. Other artists. But I think that is always a constant struggle with artists. So is always comparing yourself, even when you reach a certain age and you have that shiny resume, you're always comparing yourself to that one person you met when you were 22.

Teresa noted that comparing yourself to other actors is a challenge for a lot of theatre artists, and a skill she had to develop herself:

It's a skill to stop comparing yourself to the people around you. It just doesn't come naturally to us, because we want to compare. We want to see that kind of stuff. So you have to start practicing it early on. You have to start deciding now that I am not going to compare myself. I tell people that comparison is the thief of joy... getting your blinders on and stop looking at other people and just focus on you.

Melissa talked about how her artist identity was negatively impacted based on feeling like an outsider during her post-college transition, compared to her undergraduate

peers whom she felt had established a greater sense of community, collaboration and inclusion among themselves:

That fear of not having a good foundation has kept me from pursuing anything more than I think I could already do, but the thought of pursuing more doesn't even seem worth it... that feeling of failure and isolation still hangs over me today. Because many of the people I went to school with are collaborating and creating their own theatre companies and making work together, and they know each other and it's this whole familial bond that they have... There is a pull, I think, and a desire to move and to go somewhere else, but I can't tell if that's from the resentment of what I see and feel as an outsider looking in, or if it's me just trying to escape what I've already created for myself.

Vanessa discussed the struggle between being an actor and moving on to a career in stage management, and how that conflicted with her feelings of identity as an artist:

I still kind of want to be more of the actor thing, and I think it's partly that the actors are the ones that get all the credit, you know? People don't always think about the stage manager... You still kind of want that recognition that the actors get that you don't always get if you are behind the scenes.

On a broader, philosophical scale, Paige discussed her identity in the context of whether she is worthy enough as an artist to carry on the work that other people have done before her:

Those moments when you think to yourself, I'm not enough. Or, what right do I have to be an artist? Or the question that I frequently struggle with is that theatre has been around for thousands of years. What right do I have to continue it on? I mean, I know that's a very loaded question, but it's one that I very much struggle with every day.

Rachelle talked about how her difficult personal challenges and experiences motivated and influenced her identity as an actor:

I feel like those experiences make me stronger. And I was talking to another actor, who was like, 'You may not have the same skill set as other people, but what you do have is your experience. And you have to put that into your work.' And so, as hard as those experiences are, I'm like, well, you've got some more fodder to put in your show. Next time you have to deal with a difficult situation, you know how you would handle that in real life. You have something to channel. So yeah, those things are part of me. And there's a part of me that wishes that they had never

happened. But I feel like all of it adds on to my experience as an actor, and I think motivates me even more to prove people wrong.

Artist” as “labeling.” About a third of the participants discussed how the term “artist” evolved for them personally over time and interviewees noted how the definition of “artist” is earned through their own eyes and in the eyes of others. For Naomi, the ability to call yourself an actress had to be earned: “I felt like even though I'd been doing this since I was very young and done various forms of training, like I hadn't earned it yet. And I feel like now I've earned it. I've earned the chance to call myself an actress.”

Derrick found that with the label of artist comes responsibility:

I think that when I graduated I was like, yeah, I may have called myself an artist a few times. Like, yeah, I do theater, whatever that means. But as I've been three years out now, I'm aware of the definition. I'm a little more aware of what that means. And I now call myself a theatre artist, first and foremost. But now I understand what that title means and what comes with that. You can call yourself an actor, but what comes with that?... So, I think in order to call yourself an artist, you have to be an actively engaged artist. Just being aware and growing yourself.

Grant reflected on the fact that though he originally felt uncomfortable with the pretentious aspect attached to the label of artist, that he now feels more comfortable with a specific identity label: “I think that I do now identify as an artist in general, and actor as specific.” Grant went on to describe how his perspective as an artist is now based on his growing regard for acting as a profession: “I have a lot of respect and admiration for the people that do that. I think it's... I don't know if it is elitist or snobbish to say, but I think that acting can be a noble profession.”

Conversely, Vanessa did not have the confidence in herself, based on her undergraduate and post-college theatre arts experiences, to warrant the title of artist:

I never really say I'm an artist. I've never been one to label myself as an actor, either... I just can't put that on myself because I don't always feel like I have the confidence in it...like I see auditions listed and I'm like, I don't know if I could

even do that. So sometimes it's easy to just be, well, what's the point of even trying if it's not going to be something that will ever happen? I think it has kind of affected my life after college, too. Just like the confidence of, yeah, I can do that. Because I never really got the chance to do some of it in school. Even a small school.

Identity as artist of color. Though this section of Chapter 4 is focused on Artist Identity, identity that relates to self-perception as a theatre artist who is also a person of color also emerged during coding and analysis of the interview data for one of the study participants. Rachelle, who identified as African American, contributed noteworthy comments about how her race affected her identity as an actor and person of color.

As far as my identity as a black woman goes, I view myself as a black actress and I want to do work that is edifying for myself. So, I'm always conscious when I do work... Do I want my legacy to be that I played into this stereotype, that I did this role that I don't feel good about personally? And that could mean that I miss out on roles. But if I can't live with myself looking back on this thing that I did once upon a time, that's not a good feeling for me. So, I do think about that and consider that when I audition for things. Especially as a black woman more so.

Rachelle also noted that being an African American actor had its own unexpected challenges working in the Twin Cities:

I do feel this sense of like push back from white actors in the Twin Cities, because of a lot of theaters' missions for diversity, they're like, gee, it's a great time to be a black person in the Twin Cities. You guys just get roles... someone said that to me. They were like, you're a young, beautiful black woman, you'll always have work. That's not something you have to worry about. And I'm like, yeah I do. I have to work just as hard if not harder to get seen around here. Just because everybody's got a mission to do shows with more people of color doesn't mean that there's any more roles for people of color in the Twin Cities. It's not as easy as people think it is to be an artist of color. That doesn't necessarily guarantee that I'm going to have work. And just like there's competition between white actresses, there's competition between black actresses. I mean I've lost roles to people who have been flown in from California or from New York. It's not like they're just looking in the Twin Cities. So yeah, it's still a challenge to get work around here.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will start with a discussion on the specific aspects of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Anderson et al, 2012; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995) that apply to the four primary themes that emerged during the data analysis process, followed by an examination of the study's findings in the context of its four research questions and primary themes related to the transition to post-college life for theatre arts majors. I will also present a proposed model depicting how a modification of Schlossberg's Transition Theory applies to an individual's cognitive response when encountering discrepancy between pre-graduate expectations and post-college experiences. I conclude the chapter by discussing the importance of the study, implications for practice, limitations of the study, and areas for future research.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Though Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984) was outlined in detail in Chapter Two, a brief review of the applicable components of the transition theory is offered here as it relates to findings of the research study presented below.

Schlossberg developed a transition framework in the 1980s that examined how individuals respond to transition in their lives based on the type of transition event and environment where the transition occurs, along with the coping mechanisms used by an individual to navigate the transition process (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Schlossberg's transition theory consists of three major components: (a) The type of transition (expected or unexpected) and whether it is a new or ongoing transition, (b) the coping resources that are available to deal with the

transition, and (c) how to strengthen coping resources and develop new coping strategies (Goodman et al.).

Transition theory is often applied to adults in transition and can also apply to students transitioning from college to post-college life. The core concept of transition theory is that adults who are in transition may experience significant changes to their lives that are based on both anticipated and unanticipated events. For college students, graduation is considered an anticipated event, but the outcomes after college can fall under unanticipated events, or “non-events” – where something that was expected does not occur. In this study on perceived discrepancies between the pre-graduate expectations versus post-college experiences of theatre arts majors, unexpected or non-events occurred for each of the 20 participants in this study.

When an individual goes through a transition process, Schlossberg (1984) named four coping mechanisms that an individual may incorporate as they navigate the transition process. These four coping mechanisms are called the 4S’s (situation, self, support, and strategies.). These four coping variables of Schlossberg’s transition theory aligned with recent theatre arts graduates’ psychosocial challenges during the post-college transition experience. Four primary themes emerged from an analysis and coding of the data collected across 20 individual interviews: (a) Pre-Graduate Expectations: Undergraduate Preparedness; (b) Post-College Experiences: Career, Finances, and Other Factors; (c) Discrepancies Between Pre-Graduate Expectations versus Post-College Experiences; and (d) Artist Identity: Then and Now. A summary of each of the four primary themes and their relation to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory is presented below.

Pre-Graduate Expectations: Undergraduate Preparedness. The first primary theme for this study was based on data collected to address the first research question for this study: What are the undergraduate experiences of theatre arts majors that contribute to the pre-graduate preparation and expectations for the transition to post-college life? The first primary theme of Undergraduate Preparedness was determined to be relevant to this study as the undergraduate experiences related to a participant's theatre arts major, especially those experiences that impacted their level of post-college preparedness, could be considered part of the post-college transition process since the study participants identified several areas that highly impacted their transition to life after college and significantly impacted their level of preparedness as emerging theatre artists. Within the primary theme of Undergraduate Preparedness, three secondary themes emerged: (a) Faculty Impact on Theatre Arts Majors' Expectations, (b) Post-College Preparation, and (c) Type of Program Track (BA versus BFA). Participant comments noted both positive and negative contributors for each of these three secondary categories.

In relation to the secondary theme of Faculty Impact, about two-thirds of the study participants noted that the extent and type of interactions with theatre arts faculty members had a significant impact on their development as emerging theatre artists, and their interactions with their professors was evenly split between positive and negative contributions. Positive contributors included meaningful mentor relationships both during and after their college years, substantial academic and professional development opportunities, and faculty who were recently and professionally connected to the theatre industry. Negative contributors included student conflict with theatre arts professors, undergraduate department resistance to outside professional theatre opportunities, and

professors who were not well connected or experienced in current best practices in the theatre industry.

The next secondary theme was Post-College Preparation, which also had both positive and negative contributors that emerged from participant comments across interviews. About half of the participants noted that positive contributors included access to useful career and life post-college preparation courses, valuable internship opportunities, and beneficial interactions with visiting theatre artists who brought “real life” experiences to the classroom through workshops and seminars. Conversely, negative contributors included the absence of or unhelpful post-college preparation courses and lack of access to or awareness of internship opportunities through poor communication on the part of their undergraduate theatre programs.

The third and final subtheme of Undergraduate Preparedness was the type of program track that students participated in as theatre arts majors; the general liberal arts BA track (Bachelor of Arts), or the more selective, conservatory-type BFA track (Bachelor of Fine Arts). About a third of the participants were part of an undergraduate theatre arts degree program that offered both BA and BFA tracks, and thus were able to observe dissimilarities between the two programs. In general, BFA programs are perceived to provide individualized focus on their students and greater opportunities for specialized courses than the more generalized BA programs. Only 3 of the 20 study participants attended a BFA program, while the other 17 study participants were part of a BA theatre arts track.

Relation to Schlossberg’s transition theory. The findings of the first primary theme of Undergraduate Preparedness is related to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory in

several ways. The findings of the first primary theme of Undergraduate Preparedness align with Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995); particularly in regard to Schlossberg's four coping strategies that individuals use as resources when managing a transition process.

Graduating from college is considered a type of transition event which Schlossberg noted as an "anticipated transition" (1984). Several of the participants in this study engaged with one or more of the coping mechanisms outlined by Schlossberg as part of her transition model (situation, support, self, strategies). The period right before college graduation can be a time that triggers a transitional situation where a significant role change will be occurring for students, along with a possible feeling of loss of control based on the change of status from student to worker. Though graduating from college is generally considered a positive rite of passage, it can be a time fraught with anxiety about the future. "It is not the transition per se that is critical, but how much it alters one's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. This explains why even desired transitions are upsetting." (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 159). This period is a time when graduating students may seek out answers and information about what to expect and prepare for after college, and also look for coping resources to manage the transition process.

Anderson et al. (2012) noted that support systems are varied and include "intimate relationships, family units, network of friends, and the institutions and/or communities of which the people are a part" (p. 84). For a few participants in this study, they noted that when they were students in their theatre arts undergraduate program, there was institutional support for their post-college transition in the form of formal undergraduate programming, such as seminars and courses that were designed to assist in the post-

college transition. Less formal support was often in the form of creating bonds with faculty members who became a student's mentor to help them prepare for life after college, as well as conversations with visiting artists who shared their "real life" experiences and answered student questions about the current theatre industry. These types of institutional and personal supports also overlapped with additional coping strategies that participants noted they used as theatre arts majors to manage the upcoming transition to life after college.

As part of the coping mechanism of strategy, several of the study participants noted that their undergraduate years were a time when they were setting up goals for the future that were tied to the expectations that they had for life after college. Creating plans, such as determining where they would live, finding a day job, and figuring out the audition process were some of the strategies they employed as undergraduates to manage their expectations and transition to post-college life as emerging theatre artists.

In relation to the coping mechanism of self and undergraduate preparedness, a few study participants noted that their experiences as undergraduates often contributed to their level of self-efficacy and level of optimism about the transition and their future. Anderson et al., (2012) noted that "self-efficacy makes a difference, as does optimism and one's style of processing the world" (p. 80). If participants noted that they had access to useful post-college programming or opportunities that contributed to greater self-confidence about their abilities and their level of preparation for the next stage in their lives, their sense of self-efficacy was a stronger coping resource to draw upon. A high level of self-efficacy may have contributed to college graduates who felt prepared for the next stage of their lives (Bandura, 1997b; Stage et al., 1999).

Of course, the reverse was also true and low self-efficacy can have a negative impact on outcomes (Betz, 2004). Several participants felt they were part of less than desirable undergraduate theatre arts program where they felt they did not have access to post-college preparation courses, student-faculty mentor relationships, internships with theatre companies, or other professional opportunities that they felt prepared them for life after college as theatre artists. For many students, being part of a general BA program track versus the more desired BFA program track also contributed to a perceived lack of preparation for their post-college lives as emerging theatre artists. These participants may have felt a lack of self-confidence or optimism about their post-college transition to life after college.

Post-College Experiences: Career, Finances, and Other Factors. The second primary theme for this study was based on data collected to address the second research question for this study: What are the career and life events that contribute to the post-college transition experiences of recent theatre arts majors? Within the primary theme of Post-College Experiences, three secondary themes emerged: (a) Career, (b) Finances, and (c) Other Factors, which included relationships and graduate school. Participants noted several sub-themes in each of the secondary themes that impacted their post-college experiences as recent theatre arts graduates.

In relation to the secondary theme of Career, all of the participants in this study were impacted by their post-college experiences in relation to one or more of the subthemes that emerged through a coding and analysis of the data collected across 20 interviews. The four sub-themes related to Career included geographical location, auditions, finding gigs, and the freelance lifestyle. About two-thirds of the participants

talked about the decision process of determining where to pursue their work as theatre artists and cited such considerations as number of active local theaters, personal connections and recommendations, and cost-of-living considerations. Participants further noted that the Twin Cities metropolitan area was considered a good “theatre city” for opportunities for theatre work, and generally considered more affordable and livable than the traditional entertainment capitals of New York City and Los Angeles.

In addition to location, participants talked about the audition process. Actors accounted for almost half of the study participants and they discussed high competition for acting roles, especially female roles, demanding rehearsal schedules, and little to no monetary compensation. Actors also talked about the reality of the theatre market which is usually quite difficult to break into, the need to audition repeatedly to land a role, dealing with constant rejection, managing temporary, short-term theatre gigs, and then repeating the cycle multiple times a year for each role. Some actors noted how hard it was for them to break into the theatre industry, but other participants noted that they were able to get roles quite quickly, but had other challenges, such as finding desired roles, choosing only to work paying theatre gigs – which are few in number and highly competitive, and seeking a balanced lifestyle.

About half of the participants noted that finding well-paying gigs is challenging and highly competitive, so small stipends are the norm, thus it is difficult or impossible for most artists to make a living with theatre work only. Participants noted the need to develop a “thick skin” in order to survive a challenging industry where the ideal is to land a paying gig. About a third of the participants in both performing roles, as well as creative roles (e.g., stage managing, directing, etc.) noted they sometimes took unpaid

roles to build their credentials, work with a prestigious theatre company, or simply as a highly desired theatre gig.

About a third of the study participants talked about the challenges of an entrepreneurial lifestyle without guaranteed regular work, pay, or benefits – and having to work one or more regular day jobs to pay for living expenses. Participants noted that the irregularity and inconsistency of freelance theatre work, and not knowing when their next job was coming up, was one of the most challenging aspects of being a freelancer. A couple of the participants noted that they were able to pull enough gigs together to live primarily off their theatre wages. It is interesting to note that those participants were either working as stage managers or as costumers – not as performers.

In relation to the secondary theme of Finances, interviewees talked about survival day jobs, family financial support, student loan debt and cost-of-living expenses as some of the financial challenges that participants encountered during their post-college transition experience. Two-thirds of the participants discussed the challenges of day jobs with limited flexibility for auditions and rehearsal schedules. Though theatre artists most often consider their artistic work as their “real job,” they almost always have another full-time job or multiple part-time jobs to pay for living costs. Survival day jobs for theatre artists are usually a regular office job during the day, working with a temp agency, or a combination of part-time jobs in customer service, retail and food-service. Participants noted that as theatre artists they are often looking for the “perfect” day job that is a good match for an artist’s lifestyle and that allows them the flexibility, benefits, and pay scale – and is palatable enough to sustain for a longer period of time. Participants noted that a cubicle job can be “soul-draining,” and they often had to move from job to job to find a

good match for their lifestyle. Though most of the participants noted challenging job situations, a few found positive outlets in their day jobs, especially if they were creative in nature or paid well enough to alleviate constant worries about their finances.

About half of the participants discussed how family financial support helped them launch their careers as theatre artists. The types of familial support provided included help with tuition, housing, relocation, paying off student loan debt, and assisting with ongoing training as theatre artists. About a third of the participants discussed financial challenges with day-to-day living, such as housing expenses, finding a job that pays well enough to cover cost of living expenses, paying off student debt, and additional costs attached to the life of a theatre artist, such as paying for photo headshots and resumes. Participants noted that their challenging financial situation was a constant state of stress and anxiety and their thoughts were “consumed by money,” especially since most theatre artists do not usually make anything close to a living wage. A few participants noted that having a well-paying survival job, or a partner with a good day job, relieved quite a bit of stress.

The third and final subtheme was Other Factors, which included personal relationships and graduate school. One of the factors that emerged from an analysis of the study was the impact of personal relationships on study participants’ transition to life after college. About two-thirds of the participants talked about how partners, parents, friends, extended family and former college mentors – had a significant impact on the financial, emotional, and professional development of these participants. “The support available at the time of transition is critical to one’s sense of well-being.” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 160). Participants noted that if they had a significant other, their partners often

provided emotional and financial stability as they pursued the erratic lifestyle of a theatre artist. Participants also noted their partners were often pursuing a different career trajectory outside of the theatre industry, and that these relationships could provide a strong support system, but also could create additional pressure if their partners wanted to pursue a different career or lifestyle, or if their partners were also artists, but wanted to relocate for different theatre jobs and opportunities. In addition, a few participants noted that their parents took care of their taxes, and helped with housing and financial challenges, such as paying off their student debt loans. Participants also noted that a community of friends, both inside and outside the theatre community, was another type of support as a theatre artist.

The option of graduate school also emerged across interviews and about half of the participants were either considering or actively applying to graduate school. An MFA is considered the terminal degree in the performing arts. Generally, participants perceived that pursuing an advanced degree would give them better credentials and opportunities as emerging theatre artists within the industry. The decision to apply to graduate school was dependent on finances, additional school loan debt, and perceived advantages of having a master's degree. Participants talked about the issues related to acquiring an MFA, such as the willingness to relocate, uproot their partners, and acquire additional student loan debt for a master's degree when they were already struggling financially – and that a career in theatre was unlikely to be lucrative, unless they made the “big time.” Other participants talked about how one of the most valuable aspects of graduate school in theatre is to make connections in the industry that will hopefully lead to greater professional opportunities.

Relation to Schlossberg's transition theory. The findings of the second primary theme of Career, Finances, and Other Factors also align with Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg et al., 1995; Schlossberg, 1984) and the four coping resources of situation, support, strategies and self. Transition often includes the ending of one role and the beginning of another role, such as from student to worker. After they left college, most of the study participants encountered unanticipated outcomes in their post-college transition experience. These types of events are considered non-scheduled events that occur suddenly (Schlossberg, 2008). Examples of these types of events were positive occurrences for a few of the study participants, such as inheriting money from a relative to help pay expenses while they looked for work after college or getting hired at a prestigious theatre company to work as a stage manager early in their career. A few other participants found that the unanticipated events that occurred were unexpected in different ways and often related to their survival jobs, such as realizing that they would have to leave their day job to take on theatre work and then hunt for a new day job upon their return, or when they found that they were getting cast quite frequently in productions, but realizing that they may be interested in pursuing a more balanced, stable, and lucrative life outside of theatre work.

As participants experienced their career and life paths after college, stressors occurred for many of the participants as they utilized their coping resources to manage these challenges. Regarding the coping resource of situation, many of the participants noted that they had a sense of loss of control as emerging theatre artists. The theatre industry, by design, is set up for a high-degree of "failure," due to high competition and limited opportunities. For example, an actor may have to audition many times to get an

acting role, and the reason for getting that role is often beyond their control based on external factors such as physical characteristics and gender. If an individual is not a good fit for a role, they are unlikely to get cast no matter how talented they are in their ability. A greater awareness of how the professional theatre industry actually works may have been an unexpected outcome in the transition process for many of the participants of the study. In addition, a few of the participants noted that their new-found freedom after college was a source of anxiety. Effectively utilizing their time without external deadlines and managing their erratic schedules away from the focus and order provided in college was a new experience for these emerging theatre artists. This new lifestyle was a challenge for some participants in dealing with a new situation that required them to strategize better time management and skills to navigate life as a freelance contractor.

Beyond career issues, the reality of managing finances with little income as an actor also was a trigger point for many of the participants as they realized how much they would have to work other jobs to pay for living expenses. Finding a good day job that was both flexible and paid enough for expenses was a challenge for many participants and an unexpected situation that they continued to navigate throughout the transition process. Sometimes moving in and out of jobs repeatedly was a strategy they used to cope with trying to find the right balance in the transition to post-college life as artists.

For a few participants, additional help was found in the form of family financial support which assisted participants with financial concerns during their post-college transition. Such assistance included parents who paid off student loans or provided temporary housing for their off-spring, or grandparents who left inheritance money to help pay for expenses the first year out of college. For those participants in a relationship,

their significant other or spouse often provided support financially and took on the greater responsibility of paying for cost-of-living expenses, so their partners could pursue a part-time career in theater. Partners and family also provided emotional support during the transition to post-college life, and a few participants stayed in touch with their college mentors for moral support and post-college advice as emerging theatre artists.

Discrepancies between Pre-Graduate Expectations versus Post-College Experiences. The third primary theme for this study was based on data collected to address the third research question for this study: Are there perceived discrepancies between the pre-graduate expectations and the post-college experiences of theatre arts graduates during the transition to life after college, and if so, what are the dimensions along which these perceived discrepancies occur? The third primary theme of Discrepancies between Pre-Graduate Expectations versus Post-College Experiences yielded three secondary themes regarding discrepancies: (a) Pre-Graduate Feelings and Expectations, (b) Unexpected Post-College Career and Life Experiences, and (c) Discrepancies between Expectations versus Experiences. Each of the 20 participants noted that their transition experiences were different to some degree in one or more areas than originally expected before graduation.

In relation to the secondary theme of Pre-Graduate Feelings and Expectations, participants' expectations were often tied to their specific undergraduate experience in relation to their theatre major program. At the time of college graduation, more participants had mixed to negative feelings about the transition from college than positive feelings. About half of the participants expressed negative emotions such as fear and anxiety in relation to their expectations for post-college life. Participants who felt that

their undergraduate program had not adequately trained them for a career as theatre artists felt anxious and unprepared for a career in the theatre industry. Other participants noted that they questioned their decision to pursue a career in theatre, especially when confronted with the impending reality of the financial challenges of making a living as a theatre artist. For other participants who had a positive undergraduate experience, there was reluctance and a sense of “dread” to leave a program which had provided structure, familiarity, and a comforting sense of security.

About a third of the participants had mixed emotions which they described as “bittersweet,” and “nervous” and which were based on feeling ambivalent about a future where they were feeling both excitement and trepidation. If a participant felt confident in their skill set upon leaving college, their expectations and self-efficacy were high, but they were also apprehensive about facing the unique challenges of a freelance career. However, a sense of anticipation and excitement about the future balanced out any negative emotions they may have felt about the next steps in their lives. Not surprisingly, if a participant had a mixed experience in their theatre arts program, it also led to more mixed feelings at the time of college graduation.

About a third of the participants had positive emotions at college graduation and felt “ready,” “eager,” and “confident” about their future. These feelings were often attached to a sense of readiness for the road ahead and an eagerness to move on from college. In addition, these participants recalled that they were more curious about the what future held for them, as well as having a strong sense of adventure, and were not as worried about the next steps in their lives and faced their future lives with greater confidence.

In addition to noting their feelings in relation to pre-graduate expectations, participants recalled their expectations at the time of college graduation. About two-thirds of the participants talked about their career expectations and their plans ranged from specific goals to a wait and see approach. Goals ranged from the quintessential actor's dream of "Broadway" and leaving a legacy of artistic work, to a more pragmatic approach of giving themselves one year after college graduation to pursue their dream of being a theatre artist before trying a different career path. Other participants intended to keep trying to make a successful career as a theatre artist indefinitely and see where the theatre jobs unfolded organically.

In relation to the second subtheme of Unexpected Post-College Career and Life Experiences, participants noted specific challenges related to career issues with finding work in a highly competitive industry and lack of job stability as a freelancer. Challenges related to finances was also an unexpected outcome in their transition to life after college for several participants. A noteworthy finding was that almost two-thirds of the participants noted that their career expectations were not the same as their actual post-college experiences. The noted differences across interviews centered on the challenges related to finding any theatre work, finding non-theatre jobs that allowed flexibility and paid enough to support their career aspirations, and high competition and frequent rejection in the search for theatre work. Other issues that emerged from the data were dealing with geographical relocation, new responsibilities, and erratic work schedules related to a freelance lifestyle. Several participants noted that finding flexible and decent-paying survival day jobs was very challenging right out of college, and that they had to change jobs frequently in order to balance theatre work with day jobs. Finding consistent

and meaningful theatre work was harder than expected for several participants, and some of the female participants noted how challenging it was to find theatre work as a female artist, where there is more supply than demand for female roles. Though the majority of career discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations and actual post-college experiences were on the negative side for most participants, a few participants noted that things turned out better than expected and they were able to find regular, paying theatre jobs after college – often with prestigious theatre companies.

In addition to unexpected career-related outcomes, about a third of the participants found that their financial expectations turned out differently than their actual experiences. In particular, participants found how challenging it was to survive on a limited budget as a theatre artist. In general, theatre artists do not earn an income level needed to pay for general cost of living expenses. For a few participants, family financial assistance allowed them to pursue their artistic careers. Family financial contributions helped with housing costs, tuition, student loan debt, and help with daily cost-of-living expenses that allowed them greater flexibility and time with finding survival day jobs to help support themselves. However, the majority of participants noted that financial issues were a continuing challenge that they navigated on a daily basis. Participants noted that the “starving artist” concept was romanticized, and that reality is much harsher than anticipated. Participants also felt they would have benefited from their programs being more realistic about pursuing a life in the arts – especially at the beginning of their career.

In addition to career and finances, about a third of the participants noted that additional life factors, such as managing finances, turned out differently than expected. Other issues for some participants included challenges related to learning time

management skills and being unprepared for how many hours needed to balance a theatre career, day job, and rehearsal schedules. Also, professional networking in the theatre industry was much harder than expected. Some participants had more positive outcomes, such as developing new skill sets as an artist and in other areas of their lives, such as teaching and education that felt related to their work as artists and gave them more career and work options.

The third secondary theme was Discrepancies between Expectations versus Experiences. Though each of the 20 participants in the study noted a discrepancy with some aspect of the transition to life after college, about half of the participants commented specifically on what they perceived to be discrepancies between their pre-graduate expectations and actual post-college experiences. Participants discussed their changing expectations and perspectives after going through their post-college transition experiences. When participants encountered perceived discrepancies between what they thought would happen after college and what they actually encountered, it resulted in a range of psychological reactions, and for a few participants, more tangible actions taken to address the barriers they encountered in their post-college trajectory. Participants noted that their encountered discrepancies were primarily career-related.

For some participants, the discrepancy turned out to be positive in that things turned out better than expected and found they had steady theatre work, at least for participants who pursued creative jobs in stage management and in costume design. However, the majority of the participants noted that they encountered discrepancies that were more negative in nature, and that things did not turn out as desired. The areas that participants noted were different than expected were primarily focused on career

outcomes. Challenges with finding any decent job after college graduation, and having to settle for part-time retail work, or finding day jobs that work with theatre schedules. Even if they found steady work as an actor, the constant stress of navigating both day jobs and theatre gigs did not allow for a sense of life balance. Participants also noted how long and hard the road was to a career in theatre and their ongoing anxiety about their future when things did not turn out as hoped. Dealing with the constant rejection and how depressing and “scary” it was to get constant “noes” from theaters. There was also the realization that maybe having a college degree was not necessarily a way to open any door, and that maybe having a degree did not mean as much as expected in the theatre industry.

Relation to Schlossberg’s transition theory. The findings of the third primary theme of Discrepancies between Pre-Graduate Expectations versus Post-College Experiences is related to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995). In relation to Schlossberg’s coping mechanisms, the four coping strategies of situation, self, support and strategies play a lesser role. Primarily the coping mechanism of situation was triggered specifically in relation to the type of transition that occurred. In this study on perceived discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations versus post-college experiences, encountering a different outcome than what was expected is often challenging, as was noted by several of the study participants. Schlossberg (2008) called this type of transition a “non-event.” Schlossberg stated that “non-events are triggered when people feel that the events that they expected to occur in their lives should have already occurred and they are woefully behind” (p. 137). For many individuals, especially young adults, there is a certain level of age- and stage-appropriate transitions

about when something should occur in their lives. As noted by a few of the emerging theatre artists in this study, sometimes they compared themselves to other artists and felt like they were not matching up to their own expectations or desired level of success. In addition, participants' level of internal support of "self" was impacted by this unexpected occurrence of aligning their own capabilities against other artists.

Each of the participants in this study noted that they had experienced some form of discrepancy between what they thought would happen and what actually transpired in their post-college transition experience in one or more areas. Most of the participants encountered discrepancy in relation to their careers. Though a few participants encountered a positive discrepancy, such as when their careers took off better than expected, most participants encountered a non-event transition that resulted in something not happening in terms of specific expectations. For example, many of the participants were not prepared for how long and how hard the artistic path would be for them. In this case, the non-event occurrence was not achieving the level of success as quickly as they had hoped for as theatre artists, and their situation was triggered by the timing of the transition event and not achieving their aims as quickly as desired. These participants noted that they had to audition multiple times to get a role, or that if cast in a show, it was in a less than desired role. A few other participants were starting to realize that they may never achieve the level of success they were hoping for; that they would never be "famous." A reexamination of an individual's dreams and hopes for the future is a big part of coping with non-events (Goodman et al., 2006). For several other participants, the fact that they could not make enough money from their theatre work alone meant that

they were dealing with financial challenges and juggling multiple jobs and responsibilities in their post-college lives.

Coping mechanisms for dealing with non-events are challenging, as they are not usually visible to the outside world because it is something that did not occur (Anderson et al., 2012). Through managing the non-event transition through various coping resources, an individual may encounter a challenging time as they arrive at a different cognitive view of the transition experience. Schlossberg (2008) noted, “people often have difficulty changing their perceptions of themselves and the world and moving to a new vision” (p. 143). Participants appeared to deal with encountered discrepancies in relation to their original expectations by reacting in both tangible and intangible ways. A few of the participants employed strategies and took actionable steps in response to things not turning out as expected (Goodman et al., 2006). Examples of such steps included auditioning for more roles, applying for directing jobs in other cities, submitting applications to multiple graduate school, and trying to find a survival day job that would allow for more flexibility and greater pay. However, though not everyone took action when confronted with a discrepancy in their post-college transition plans, each of the participants had a psychological response when encountering a discrepancy, which will be explored in the proposed model later in this chapter.

Fourth Theme: Artist Identity: Then and Now. The fourth primary theme for this study was based on data collected to address the fourth research question for this study: How do recent theatre arts majors make sense of their identity as artists during the pre-graduate to post-college transition, and how is their identity impacted by perceived discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations and post-college experiences?

The fourth primary theme of Artist Identity is important within the context of this study because of the unique aspect that the participants were theatre arts majors.

Understanding the unique challenges of theatre majors and their associated “artist identity” was explored through the lens of both career and personal identity based on an analysis of the data collected across all 20 interviews for this study.

Study participants were asked to reflect on their self-perception of artist identity at two points in their lives: at the time of college graduation, and at the time of their interview when they had gone through the post-college transition experience. Interviewee responses were grouped into two secondary themes: (a) Artist Identity at the Time of College Graduation, and (b) Artist Identity Post-College.

Artist identity at the time of college graduation. Participants in the study reflected back to their undergraduate years in relation to their perception of identity as an artist after having gone through their undergraduate program as theatre arts majors. Three subthemes emerged from an analysis of the data (a) Seeking Validation, (b) Realization of Artist Identity, and (c) Level of Confidence.

Seeking validation. About a third of the study participants noted that their identity as artists was impacted by both positive and negative experiences during their undergraduate years. Validation of participants’ identity emerged from positive feedback from their theatre professors and mentors, and if participants earned desired theatre roles or opportunities in college. External confirmation by people they trusted and valued in their undergraduate program had a significant impact on how the participants viewed themselves as artists during their college years, and often resulted in that they felt they had “earned” the right to be considered an artist. However, if participants felt a lack of

validation by their institutions, undergraduate program, or their professors, participants felt invalidated and marginalized. Lack of validation was also manifested internally rather than externally by participants. For example, if a participant felt that society, family, or partners minimized the value of being a theatre artist, they themselves also felt a lack of validation about their chosen profession.

Realization of artist identity. A third of the participants noted that they came to a realization about their identity as artists based on considering alternative career tracks to theatre. Identity realization was also based on a conviction that their artist identity was there all along, but was strengthened through their experiences as an undergraduate, and even in their earlier years, such as in high school or younger. Other participants noted they may have explored other majors or considered alternative career paths, but found the theatre world to be so compelling it could not be dismissed. Other realizations occurred through a respected mentor's words of encouragement, and for some participants it was a matter of proving their worth as an artist to the world in general.

Level of self-confidence. About a third of the participants noted that their perceived self-efficacy in their ability as an artist contributed to a high level of self-confidence in their identity as artists when they graduated from college. Their confidence in their abilities were strengthened by positive experiences in their undergraduate program, such as through receiving encouraging faculty input or participating in a positive internship experience. If a participant felt they had the right training and opportunities to build their skills, it strengthened their belief they were in the right field. Self-perception could also change dramatically over the course of their undergraduate years from low confidence to feeling fully capable through participating in more

prestigious opportunities that led to more success as a student. An exceptional internship experience or work-study opportunity was one of the biggest things to increase self-confidence, especially if a participant's work was validated by a respected outside professional in the theatre industry. A participant's self-confidence was further enhanced if the individual had a theatre job lined up at the time of college graduation.

Artist identity post-college. Participants were also asked about their identity as artists at the time of their interview for the study after having gone through the post-college transition and resulting experiences. Five subthemes emerged from an analysis of the data collected during participant interviews. (a) Pursuing Their Calling, (b) Changing Perspectives and Priorities, (c) Comparing Self to Others, (d) "Artist" as Labeling, and (e) Identity as Artist of Color.

Pursuing their calling. About a third of the participants found that pursuing work that they enjoy, combined with a sense of purpose and a strong, fundamental connection to work that was "fulfilling" and "self-sustaining" led to the best versions of themselves. Participants noted that their passion for their work as artists was their "calling" and noted that their connection with their work was something they had not found before and was a comfortable fit where everything seemed to "click into place." Other participants had even stronger descriptors, such as "elation" and "passion," and a "vital" part of their identity. Participants noted that even though they had some anxiety about their future in the theatre industry, it did not diminish their identity as an artist and they felt fortunate to have discovered themselves early on in their identity search.

Changing priorities. About a third of the participants noted that they had changing views based on their post-college transition experiences. A few participants

noted a shift in their priorities and where they wanted to spend their time and resources in terms of pursuing their theater careers, as well as how they wanted to invest in time with loved ones and pursuing other interests. For some participants, these shifts moved from a more idealistic to a more pragmatic view of life and their expectations changed since they left college based on a change in lifestyle and responsibilities. A few participants noted that they no longer had expectations that they would be “famous,” but instead were more content with pursuing theatre work they enjoyed with prestigious theatre companies. In addition, sometimes participants’ views changed based on finding contentment in work outside of theatre in other creative jobs.

Comparing self to others. About a third of the participants discussed how comparing themselves against their peers and other artists impacted their level of ability and confidence as artists. A perception of other artists’ successes against their own perceptions of failing to measure up to their own expectations was tied to their sense of identity as artists. Participants talked about comparing their own career trajectory against others that they see as more successful – especially if they are near the same age – and how they feel they “come up short” by comparison. Participants noted how it is a challenge for most artists not to constantly be comparing themselves to other artists. Participants also noted that the type of theatre program they attended was a constant source of comparing and contrasting, especially between BA and BFA tracks, where the latter was perceived to have more attention and opportunities. Personal experiences outside the theatre can also have a tremendous impact on a participant’s perception of identity as an actor, and they draw from those experiences to be better actors or theatre artists and provides them more resolve to prove themselves to others.

Artist as “labeling.” About a third of the participants discussed how the term “artist” had evolved over time for them on an individual basis. These participants felt that being able to call yourself an artist needed to be earned in their own eyes, and the eyes of others. That sense of feeling that they can lay claim to the title of artist often came through the passage of time, with more experience, more roles, and more success as a theatre artist. There also was a sense of responsibility with the title of artist. For some participants, they felt uncomfortable being called an artist as it was either perceived to be too pretentious, or they did not have the confidence in themselves to earn the title of “artist.” However, that perception changed over time for some individuals and not for others – and often appeared to be based on how comfortable they were with their occupation, theatre title or role, and how much work they had received during their post-college transition experience.

Identity as artist of color. Even though it was not a specific topic of investigation for this study, I think it is important to note a few of the comments from a participant as an artist of color who discussed her feelings about identity in relation to her race and perception of artist identity. Rachelle noted the specific set of challenges she faced working in the theatre industry. She noted that she felt a specific responsibility to her family and community to avoid playing stereotyped roles. She also talked about a certain amount of “push back” from her fellow theatre peers whom she felt had issues with diversity and casting. She noted that her peers felt that she would always have work simply based on her race, which she did not feel was the case, and that she had to work as hard or harder because roles were both fewer and more competitive, and theaters would often bring in people beyond the Twin Cities to fill roles for people of color. Rachelle

also talked about wondering whether she was getting roles based on her ability or based on her race, along with the ongoing challenge of getting work and breaking into the competitive Twin Cities theatre industry.

Relation to Schlossberg's transition theory. The findings of the fourth primary theme of Artist Identity: Then and Now is related to Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995) primarily through the coping mechanism of "self" in relation to personal identity, skill set, self-efficacy, and level of confidence. In asking these unique study participants about their identity as artists at the time of college graduation, and then at the time of their interview, an attempt was made to find any change between their perception of themselves as artists in relation to personal identity during the post-college transition process. Along with the diversity of the participants themselves, their perception of identity also varied, however not quite as much as expected. In general, most participants seemed to have fairly consistent and strong identities as artists throughout their transition process, both at the time of college graduation and even after having gone through the transition process. This may have been indicated by as much as what was said by participants during their interviews as by what was *not* said to indicate a lack of belief in themselves as artists. Statements that indicated a sudden realization that they were not capable as artists, or that their identity had lessened considerably did not emerge during the interview process. Instead, a more pragmatic outlook in relation to their identity emerged, such as realizing though they may not be "famous," as artists, they were okay with that, as long as they could engage in some fairly regular work in the theatre industry.

Furthermore, participants' identity as artists did not seem to be significantly impacted by encountering discrepancy in the transition to post-college life as emerging theatre artists. This may be the result of a general high belief in their abilities regardless of outcome. A high level of self-efficacy can lead to positive outcomes, as it can be considered a self-fulfilling prophecy (Bandura, 1997a, 1997b). It could also be a product of the millennial generation, where optimism and a strong belief in one's capabilities is considered one of the hallmarks of this generation (Balda & Mora, 2011; Lena & Lindemann, 2014; Seppanen & Gualtieri, 2012). The participants' strong sense of identity could also be attributed to also being part of a generation where some parents provide a great deal of support both financially and emotionally, and also encourage their children that they can be and do anything (Seppanen & Gualtieri). Of course, privileged "millennial" characteristics may apply to some of the study participants, but not all.

Finally, their identity as artists may have remained intact and even grown as the participants may simply have not been out of college long enough to have their identity as artists challenged by a longer period of consistent rejection, which is quite common in the theatre industry and may eventually wear down even optimistic individuals. In addition, simply having enough experience that builds up a resume or portfolio may have contributed to an increase in their identity as artists. As such, the sense of "self" that these participants brought to their transition experience was a form of internal support where they generally believed they were pursuing the right career for themselves. Overall, artist identity appeared to be stronger than expected, and such a strong identity may be difficult to disrupt even in relation to significant challenges that can be associated with the

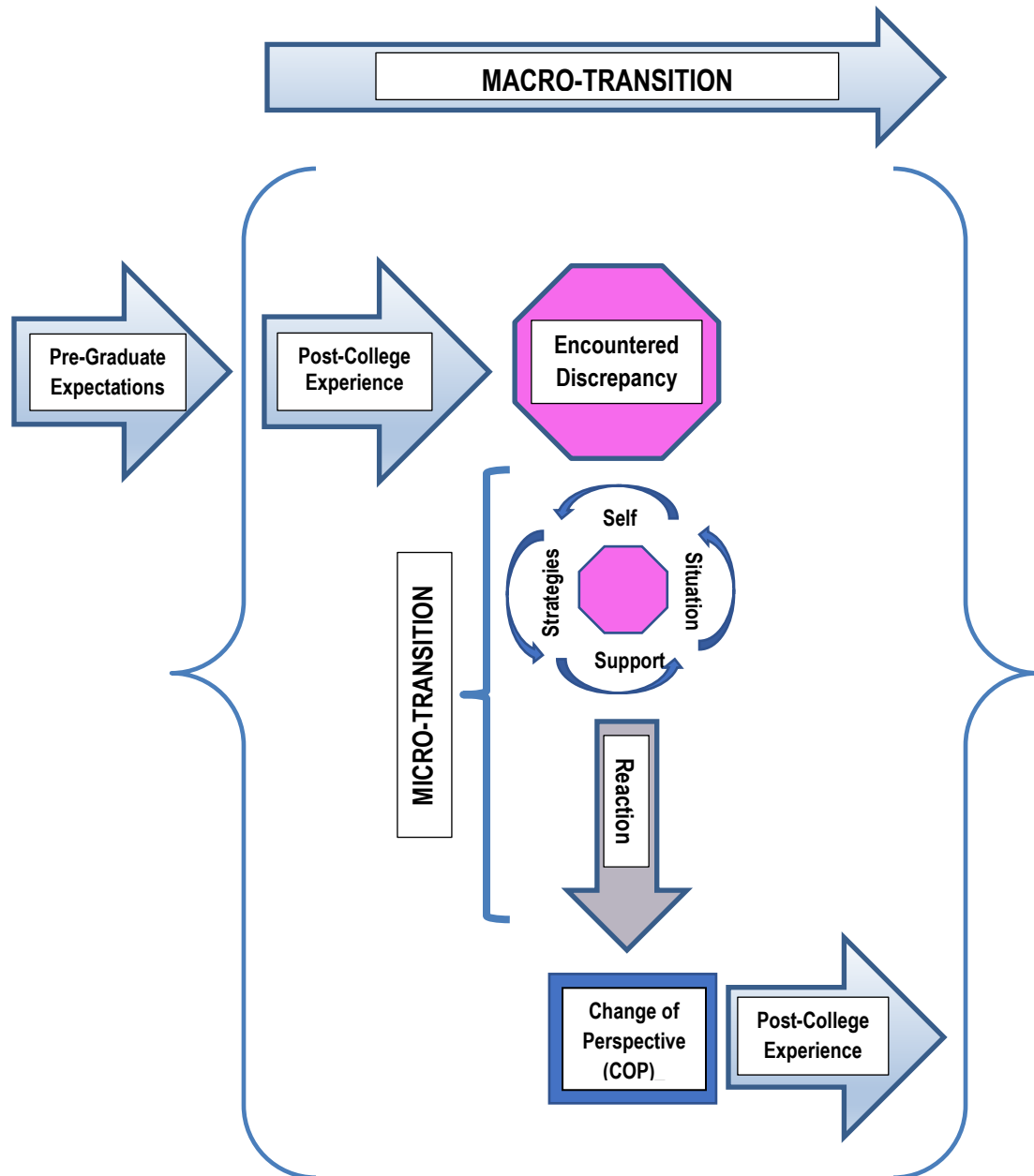
transition to post-college life – especially when expectations do not align with actual experiences.

A Proposed Model

The research design was a basic qualitative strategy of inquiry. A generic method was deemed to be an appropriate strategy when the objective is to understand the process or the perspectives of the participants in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Unlike grounded theory, the strategy of this study was not to develop a theory on the transition experience, but to explore the dimensions along which perceived discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations and post-college experiences occur for recent theatre arts majors using Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984) as a theoretical framework. Several observations emerged after analyzing the data of this study that led to a proposed model based on a modified version of Schlossberg's transition model.

The conceptual framework for this study, which was outlined in Chapter 2 (Figure 1), was based on Schlossberg's transition model (1984). My proposed conceptual model for framing the transition model for recent college graduates is presented in Figure 2 and depicts the phases of the transition process for recent college graduates that align with an added dimension of a psychological micro-transition within a macro-transition experience. During their final years at college, especially the senior year, students are in a liminal state of ambiguity about their future and the post-college transition. Expectations are formed at this time that are, in effect, a "pre-transition" period of preparation for the next stage of their lives. Preparation for life after college is occurring at this time for college seniors, such as taking post-college workshops and seminars, participating in internships, and talking with their mentors about the next stage of their lives.

Figure 2. A proposed model of a micro-transition: A psychological “change of perspective.”



At the time of college graduation, students have formed their expectations for what they think their post-college lives will be like. As they enter the post-college transition phase, recent graduates begin to experience career and life events that may be better than expected, or less than desired experiences, but are often experiences that are different than expected. When an individual observes dissent between their pre-graduate expectations and their actual post-college experiences, they may be encountering a perceived discrepancy between the two that may result in a certain amount of cognitive dissonance between what they thought would happen and what actually happened. Once this happens, an individual reacts to the situation by assessing their environment and draws upon the four coping resources noted by Schlossberg (1984) as part of the transition process (situation, self, support and strategies) to manage the transition process. The proposed model below adds an additional dimension to responding to discrepancy within a transition experience and the resulting psychological response by the individual.

A proposed model of micro-transition. Across all 20 individual interviews, an added dimension emerged in relation to the transition process when a participant encountered a discrepancy between pre-formed expectations and actual lived experiences. The phenomenon was a micro-transition within a macro-transition environment; specifically, a psychological “change of perspective” (COP) by the participant when the individual encountered something that was different than what they initially expected during the transition experience. This change of perspective was unique, in that within this study on the transition experiences of recent theatre arts majors, the change of perspective did not appear to impact their internal sense of identity as an artist as much as

expected. Instead, the change of perspective was primarily attributed to external factors related to the transition experience itself. For example, if a participant was not meeting their desired goals as expected, they generally attributed their challenges to outside influences rather than personally internalizing any perceived inability to “succeed” (e.g., “I am not getting any roles, therefore I must not be a good actor.”).

The proposed model suggests that when an individual encounters discrepancy between expectations and actual experiences, it results in a micro-transition for the individual within a macro-transition experience. A micro-transition is the resulting psychological “change of perspective” by an individual regarding the macro-transition experience that results from the realization of a discrepancy between set expectations and resulting experiences. The process by which I arrived at this concept was by analyzing several aspects of the transition process of the study participants. Since I was investigating the transition experiences of recent theatre arts majors, a specific population with a unique identity, I thought it was important to add a research question regarding how their identity as artists might be impacted when encountering discrepancy – especially with how it relates to their career trajectory as emerging theatre artists. I was also interested in the psychological reaction or actionable strategies that these participants took to address a situation that turned out differently than expected. The resulting analysis of the data collected found a different outcome than expected in this study regarding identity and strategies.

Schlossberg’s Transition Model (1984) considers the type of transition experience (e.g., non-event), and how that transition process is experienced by an individual in relation to their coping resources (situation, support, self, and strategies). Schlossberg

based her theory on looking at major life transitions, such as related to changes in personal relationships, career, and role changes. As I considered Schlossberg's model, I realized I was looking at a broader view of a transition model for primarily observable, significant life events, such as graduating from college. In effect, I was looking at a macro-transition model. However, the specific aspect I was examining in regard to discrepancy was actually a subtler part of the transition process – a micro transition experienced by the individual.

In some ways, this study examines transition within transition and looking at how encountering discrepancies are minor or major transition experiences within a larger macro-transition experience. For example, the transition from student to adult, and the transition from school to work are visible life event transitions. However, encountering discrepancies between what you thought would happen and what actually happened is a less visible transition, often psychological, that happens as part of the overall transition experience. Encountering a discrepancy between expectations and actual experiences is a less tangible transition – a micro-transition within a macro-transition experience.

Furthermore, encountering a discrepancy appeared to be unexpected or surprising to the individual experiencing the event. The encountered discrepancy was something that was different than they expected, and the resulting change of perspective was significant to the individual experiencing it, even if outside observers did not see it from their perspective. During this study, one indicator that identified if the change of perspective was important to the participant was if during their interview, the individual recalled the discrepancy on their own and described the event with enough detail to discuss what turned out differently than they expected.

The psychological response to encountering discrepancy between what they thought would happen and what actually happened led to a change in perspective by the individual, and how the transition experience unfolded for them. The change of perspective was not necessarily a change in perspective of self (ability, skill, identity, etc.), but more about the overall transition experience the individual was going through (e.g., becoming a professional theatre artist). It appeared to be a “light bulb” moment for them and a greater understanding of how the transition process was unfolding for the participant. When the individual encountered discrepancy between what they expected and actually experienced, they reacted to it by having a change of perspective in relation to their expectations moving forward about that particular facet of their macro-transition experience.

The significance of this finding on a “change of perspective” (COP) by an individual going through the post-college transition process may be helpful in understanding the cognitive process by which recent college graduates process an encountered discrepancy and attribute their new perspective to the transition process itself, rather than attribute their new perspective to their own abilities, and could have implications for practice in higher education institutions in preparing students for post-college life.

Importance of the Study

This study is important in that it provides additional research on a student population that has not had any significant research conducted on their transition to post-college life, particularly in relation to encountering discrepancy between pre-graduate expectations and post-college experiences. With the value of a liberal arts education

under public scrutiny (Dua, 2013; Hardie, 2014; Konstam et al., 2015), it is helpful to have a greater understanding of the specific challenges that recent theatre arts majors encounter in their unique lifestyle as emerging theatre artists. The demand for accountability in higher education continues to grow (Arum & Roksa, 2014a; Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998; Hora et al., 2016; Hunter et al., 2012), which also means that there is pressure on liberal arts colleges and undergraduate programs to continue to develop effective programming within their departments to ensure student success (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Gardner, 1999; Hunter et al., 2012).

Though there is a significant amount of research on the transition into college (Barefoot, 2000; Gardner 1998; Purdie & Rosser, 2011), there is not nearly as much research on the transition out of college (Gardner, 1999; Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998). This study sought to close the gap in the existing research by focusing on post-college transition of theatre arts majors. Though this study focused on theatre arts majors, the findings in this study could also be applied to other groups and populations experiencing discrepancy in other types of transition experiences (e.g., individual transitions related to career changes, changes in personal relationships and roles, geographical relocation, etc.). Finally, this study provides another dimension to Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984) by proposing an adapted transition model that addresses encountering discrepancy within a transition process.

Implications

Two decades ago, Gardner (1999) noted that the college senior-year experience, which can be both a capstone for the undergraduate experience as well as preparing students for life after college, was starting to infiltrate the higher education community,

and that “many colleges and universities are finally recognizing that assisting students in thoughtful and purposeful decision making about their futures should include providing resources about graduate programs and better information about what to expect” (p. 16). Though some progress has been made in developing post-college programming within some colleges and universities, it has been slow to materialize across institutions and there is still significant preparation for the transition to post-college life that is not fully addressed for outgoing seniors. The lack of post-college programming is especially true for theatre arts majors, where post-college programming is still lacking in breadth and depth of offerings, which was evidenced by comments made by study participants across theatre arts programs in general, and comments that noted specific differences between BA and BFA programs overall.

The findings of this study point to several implications for practice in higher education institutions in relation to post-college preparation programming. Recommendations include developing undergraduate post-college preparation courses related to the business aspects and post-college lifestyle of theatre artists, audition and resume preparation for theatre arts graduates, developing formalized student/faculty mentorship programs, and shared resources between BFA and BA program tracks. Additional recommendations include developing career counseling that specializes in post-college preparation for arts majors and creating college and university alumni programs that help to build networking opportunities between emerging theatre artists and working theatre industry professionals. It is also recommended to develop partnerships with local and national theatre companies to strengthen internships, apprenticeships, and other professional opportunities for recent theatre arts graduates, and

which may also benefit theatre companies by providing access to emerging industry talent across creative and performance disciplines.

Implications for undergraduate programming for theatre arts programs.

The transition to post-college life for theatre arts majors is similar to many liberal arts majors and includes challenges across multiple areas, including career, finances, and other life factors. Participants in this study noted the need for post-college preparation courses that address not only the artistic side of preparing for a theatre career, but also as an independent business. Across several interviews for this study, participants commented on the lack of these types of courses within their undergraduate program. Carolyn, an actress who attended a small, liberal arts college, noted that post-college preparation is not as prevalent for liberal arts majors as it may be for other majors: “I think it is something antithetical to liberal arts to give you steps to know how to handle it, which seems so messed up. Why would you not give people an idea of how this is going to be - it's going to be really hard.”

Post-college preparation business and lifestyle courses. The findings from this study suggest that there are several areas for post-college programming that would be helpful in the transition out of college for theatre arts majors. One of the most frequently noted areas of need expressed by participants was the desire for a business course that addresses the administrative challenges related to a career as a theatre professional. Evan, an actor who was a BFA major, did not have the kind of business training that would have helped prepare him for life after college and had to learn the practical administrative aspects of an actor's life on his own:

I learned on my own all the administrative work when it relates to theater.
Seeking out my own directing and writing projects, and how to write grants, press

releases, and all that kind of stuff. I think my program could have offered more in the ways of that.

Participants noted that they would have liked to learn how to do taxes, read and write business contracts, as well as learn about budget planning, ongoing performance training, building a website, writing resumes for arts and performance, and creating effective portfolios. In addition, participants noted that a course specific to time management, networking, and the administrative side of freelance work as independent contractors would have been beneficial. Heather, a freelance costumer noted this type of offering was missing from her undergraduate program: “It would have been really nice to have even just a seminar on what it is to be a freelancer, because no one taught any of us how to make ourselves into a business.” Having knowledge about these administrative areas may have alleviated some of the expressed concerns about the perceived lack of preparation by the study participants as emerging theatre artists.

Along with business courses, participants also noted that having courses related to managing “real life” as a recent college graduate would have been very helpful. A workshop or class that would have addressed challenges related to relocation, housing costs, student loans and credit card debt, health insurance, transportation costs and other daily expenses might have helped some participants avoid a few of the “costly” choices they made right out of college.

A notable finding of this study on the transition to life after college was that study participants were often surprised by unexpected outcomes to their post-college plans. One of the recommendations for encountering discrepancy during the post-college transition is to incorporate the adage of “expect the unexpected” in undergraduate programming and preparation for arts majors. By developing alternative career path options, college seniors

prepare a Plan A, Plan B, and Plan C for various post-college outcomes. “A plan becomes a map for moving from the current situation to a more desirable one, for altering the status quo, for composing a life” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 210). One recommendation is to encourage college seniors to create more than one resume for different types of work. It is not uncommon for theatre artists, as part of their undergraduate training, to acquire experience in multiple areas of the theatre industry. If students gain some experience in these alternate areas (e.g., costuming, box office, scene and lighting design, stage management, etc.) they could create resumes that reflect these additional skills that may open doors to alternate areas in the theatre industry, while still pursuing their primary desired work experience.

“Real world” teaching artists. Participants noted that having a greater understanding of what a working theatre professional lifestyle looks like before they graduated would have been helpful with their transition to post-college life. Acquiring information about what it is like in the “real world” of the theatre industry is something that students want to learn about. It is even more important if their faculty or professors are not up-to-date on the current theatre industry. Participants remarked that some of the most helpful exchanges they had were with visiting artists and theatre professionals who talked about all the challenges related to having a career as a theatre artists. These challenges included dealing with repeated rejection, the ongoing audition cycle, managing different types of theatre jobs and contracts, working with challenging directors, choosing the kinds of roles that will advance your career, managing dry periods with no theatre gigs, and juggling other survival jobs that almost all artists need to have in addition to their intermittent theatre gigs.

Actor preparation and audition technique courses. A few study participants who identified as actors recalled that several of their undergraduate programs did not provide adequate preparation for the post-college audition process. As noted earlier, auditions for actors are essentially the equivalent of the interview process for other industries. Understanding the audition process and creating a portfolio of materials such as song and monologues binders for auditions, along with knowing how to create an effective resume for theatre artists, was something that several actors felt they had missed and thus were not feeling adequately prepared for the audition process. This lack of preparation caused anxiety about the unknown among some participants. Melissa, an actress, talked about the type of audition course that would have been helpful in her own program:

Above all else, I think they should require an audition prep class, whether that be learning how to do cold reads, learning how to do monologues, learning what your resume should look like. How early should you show up to an audition? What should you say or not say? Do you shake hands, or do you not shake hands? And all that seems really simple, but it's things that I have heard other institutions doing that we just didn't do.

Internship and work study opportunities. Though internships with theaters may provide coveted professional and networking experiences for theatre majors, a few study participants noted that they had a difficult time learning about internship opportunities from their professors or their theatre arts departments. Developing a policy of connecting theatre arts majors with local theatre companies would be a way to help navigate the transition process by developing a network of industry professionals for emerging artists. Theatre arts departments and faculty could also look at more effective ways to communicate various internship opportunities to their students through announcements in the classroom or personal conversations with students. A few participants noted that the only way they learned about internship opportunities was to see it as a notice on a

hallway board. Other ways to communicate about internships, professional theater auditions, industry jobs and opportunities could be delivered through regular department email communications with students, and through department newsletters and social media sites.

BA versus BFA programming. Several study participants noted the differences between the more specialized Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) track, and the more generalized Bachelor of Arts (BA) track, especially if their institution offered both options for theatre arts majors to compare against during their college years. The perception of increased marginalization from BA majors who felt that they didn't receive the same level of faculty focus, specialized courses and programming, and greater opportunities to take part in college productions and professional networking development is inherent in the differences between a conservatory degree track and a more generalized degree track. However, undergraduate theatre arts programs may benefit from examining their programming to see if more opportunities can be developed across the two disciplinary tracks in order to better prepare all theatre arts majors for post-college life. For example, an undergraduate program may open up a teaching artist workshop or resume building course to more than just BFA students, even if it is just to have BA majors audit the course to have an opportunity to learn more about performance preparation for actors, for example. Another suggestion may be to create opportunities for basic, student-led self-productions that could be mounted far easier and creatively than costlier full college productions. This type of production opportunity, which could be mentored by rotating theatre professors, may add much desired production opportunities for BA students who wish to learn and experience different aspects of participating in a

theatre production, especially those in large theatre programs, but are unable to participate in a regular college production. Reassessing the costs and benefits of slight adjustments to existing undergraduate programming may lead to stronger programs generally and more well-rounded emerging theatre artists specifically.

Implications for faculty. Study participants noted that there were a few areas related to interactions with faculty members that lead to additional implications for practice. College seniors rely on professors to help them with academic concerns, including their future career and graduate school plans, and letters of recommendation. However, these discussions often evolve into discussions about a student's hopes, dreams, and future plans, and this level of in-depth discussion and reflection is often vital for seniors going through this transitional period. Participants recalled that if they had a strong student/mentor relationship, that it provided a sense of connection and mattering to these students. Implications for practice suggest that theatre arts programs develop formal mentorship programs. Theatre arts majors, especially those in the less visible BA programs, may benefit through greater and more meaningful interactions with their theatre professors. This may be especially true in relation to larger programs that may not allow theatre students to be as actively engaged in college productions due to fewer acting and creative roles for many students. Support for faculty members, including any needed resources, is also recommended for theatre arts undergraduate programs to help facilitate the development of such mentorship programs.

Implications for alumni organizations. About half of the study participants mentioned that networking was an important way to connect to future theatre jobs and opportunities. Several of the participants noted the challenges associated with developing

a network of contacts when first entering the theatre industry as a young professional and that the concept of networking is an awkward process. Naomi talked about how networking was a difficult skill to master, and something that she wished she had learned in college: “Maybe this is going to sound absurd, but conversations in how networking looks like. Because we were told that networking is important... but it feels really weird.”

About half of the participants talked about the importance of networking and how challenging it was to develop a professional theatre network as an emerging theatre artist. Participants talked about how much of the business of theatre is conducted through connections and “who you know.” Recommendations for jobs and other opportunities arise out of people noting if you are good at your job and personally reaching out to you for theatre work. Implications for practice suggest that creating networking opportunities within college programs that connect students with professionals in the field would be beneficial, such as discussed earlier through internship opportunities and inviting professional teaching artists into the classroom.

Another way to support emerging theatre professionals is to have a more active alumni organization associated with their college or university in matching up theatre professionals with emerging theatre artists. Oscar, who is working in theater administration, talked about how his desire for an alumni network to connect with after college would have made the process of transitioning smoother, especially with those who have relocated to a new city:

I think if they would have had a larger kind of outreach that had emphasized, hey, if you have questions, then ask these people who have graduated and what they are doing now. I feel I don't know a lot of alumni... and I feel like that would have been really, really cool or more helpful to have the university be like, hey, here's somebody you can contact in the area.

Alumni can give back to their college or university not only financially, but also by being mentors and advisors to college seniors or recent graduates. College seniors may feel isolated when experiencing the transition out of college, especially when they face multiple challenges and concerns or simply have questions about career or job paths and next steps. A one-on-one mentor relationship with a former graduate and successful theatre arts professional from their institution may provide a unique form of support during this transition. The opportunity to discuss issues related to the transition to a career in theatre with someone who has already gone through the process may provide further guidance and help college seniors in developing a professional network of support, and also solidify allegiance to their institutions. Thus, “being attended to and having one’s specific needs met is likely to create a greater sense of mattering and connection to the institution” (Tovar, Simon, & Lee, 2009, p. 175).

Implications for professional theaters. Another way to potentially connect students with theatre professionals is to create partnerships between college theatre arts programs with local theatre companies. Internships, work study, and apprenticeships, as well as opportunities to do observations or informational interviews with professional theatre artists in the community, all allow for “real life” observation and networking opportunities for emerging theatre artists. More formalized programs, or even informal approaches to this type of networking and professional mentoring may help emerging theatre artists feel more connected to theatre opportunities upon graduation. These connections could be set up not just at the local level, but at a national level, as theatre artists often relocate to different parts of the country for various work opportunities.

Theaters could also benefit from these types of partnerships by having access to emerging talent in the theatre industry and developing community outreach.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. Limitations of the study included conducting the study through a single source of data collection, self-reported data, researcher perspective, geographical locations, limitation of the study, and research timeframe. Each of these limitations is described in the following section.

Data collection method. A single, in-person interview, lasting between 45 minutes and 60 minutes, was the only method used for collecting data for this study. Though the length of each interview adequately provided enough time to answer the pre-determined interview questions, the data collected was limited to one source, rather than a combination of additional sources. Creswell (2013) noted that “when qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or themes in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings” (p. 251). Thus, the single data collection method for this study limited the opportunity to expand upon and provide additional validation of the data.

Self-reported data. In addition, the nature of the questions in the interview asked participants to recall events that happened up to three years ago during their undergraduate college experience. Though the participants did not seem to indicate obvious difficulty in recalling their experiences or perceptions at the time of the interview, it must be assumed that time and distance could have altered participants’ perceptions of the events in question, and thus may not have provided as reliable or valid

data recalled about past events due to the self-reported nature of the data collection method.

Researcher perspective. This study used a purposeful sample selection process which allowed the researcher to secure participants who “can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). Research subjects were self-selected from the population based on a first-come basis after fulfilling qualifications to participate in the study. The study’s participants were recent theatre arts majors who had graduated from a four-year institution, were geographically based in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area and were pursuing a career in the theatre industry.

The selection of this particular liberal arts major was chosen because the post-college transition experiences of theatre arts majors is not well documented in the higher education literature, and also due to my professional activity and interest in the theatre industry – which I share a common bond with the participants of this study. It is important to note that I am a founder of a small theatre company in the Twin Cities metro area. The participants were made aware of this information prior to responding to the advertisement for study candidates. To avoid any conflict of interest, a potential candidate for this study could not have worked with me previously in any professional theatre capacity, or as a former student when I was an academic college advisor. However, as the researcher for this study, my perspective may have influenced the results of the findings of this study due to the fact that I work in the theatre industry, and my opinions on theatre arts majors may be slanted by a function of my own personal experiences. In addition, because I run a theater company, it is possible that some of the

participants were reluctant to share specific information regarding their experiences with the Twin Cities theatre industry. However, as I was interviewing people in their twenties who are part of the typically high-disclosure millennial generation, I did not feel that particularly impeded what they shared regarding their experiences as a theatre artist in the Twin Cities area and gave the impression of sharing their experiences quite openly.

Geographical location. A limitation of this study is that it was situated in one geographical location – the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. The study participants were currently residing and working in the Twin Cities, but several of the participants discussed their experiences that occurred in other locations around the country. For example, several undergraduate experiences were related to their institutions, which were located primarily in the Midwest and Eastern regions on the United States. Actual theatre career experiences were also primarily located in the Twin Cities, with most of the study participants relating their work experiences with local theaters. However, a few of the participants also talked about theatre jobs they held in other parts of the country, as theatre artists often take out-of-town gigs, especially if it is on a paid professional contract and a desirable theatre gig.

Another limitation of this study was that it was conducted with participants who reside and primarily work in one geographical location. As study participants noted earlier in the paper, location is a substantial factor regarding relative theatre industry opportunities, as well as other life factors, such as cost-of-living expenses. The Twin Cities may have different factors that impact outcomes for recent theatre arts majors, compared to other geographical locations, such as Los Angeles or New York City, both of which are considered to be much more competitive for jobs and have a significantly

higher cost-of-living factor. Results of this study specific to the Twin Cities may not apply to other cities or geographical locations.

Research timeframe. One of the limitations of this study is the length of time study participants had been out of college at the time of their interviews. This study examined the perceived discrepancies between the pre-graduate expectations and the post-college experiences of theatre arts majors. The research for this study was conducted between 1.5 and 3.5 years from the time of college graduation relative to each of the study participants. The length of time out of college was carefully considered as part of the original research design for this study in order to examine the transition experiences of recent theatre arts graduates. However, if the study had been conducted with theatre arts majors who had graduated at an earlier time with a longer transition period, such as five to ten years out, the findings and results of this study might have been quite different based on the length of their post-college transition period.

Areas for Future Research

Data collection method. There are several areas for future research that could build on the findings of this study. Some of the recommendations for future research that emerged address limitations of the study as noted above. For example, the data collection of this study was conducted with a single method of data collection – a single interview with each study participant. Recommendations for conducting the study with additional or other data collections methods would provide an opportunity for triangulation of the data by using surveys, case studies, or other design approaches. A survey, for example, would allow the researcher to acquire data from a much larger sample population rather than limited to a smaller number of interviews. A survey may also find greater diversity

in participant experiences, if it self-selects people who are not as comfortable with in-person interviews and would prefer to answer an anonymous questionnaire regarding their post-college transition experiences.

It is also recommended that this study be conducted as a longitudinal study with multiple interviews with the same participants at different points during the transition process. For example, conducting a first interview at one year out of college, a second interview at five years out of college, and a third interview at ten years out of college to see if the transition experiences and perceptions of discrepancy between expectations and post-college experiences change over a greater time period for theatre arts majors.

Geographical location. The geographic limitations of this study presented an opportunity for future exploration of the transition of theatre arts majors in other major theatre cities. The Midwest focus of this study may impact factors related to emerging theatre artists, such as theatre work opportunities and living conditions that impact the lives of emerging theatre artists. Specifically, a recommendation for future research is a study that focuses on either of the other two main theatre cities in the United States: Los Angeles and New York City. A study that focuses on one of these major theatre cities may find significantly different outcomes when examining specific discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations and post-college experiences in the transition to post-college life as it relates to other geographical locations in highly competitive and expensive theatre cities. Alternative theatre cities, such as Chicago, Seattle, and even overseas in London, may also reveal different experiences in the transition to post-college life.

Other demographics. Another recommendation for future research is to examine the post-college transition experiences of specific demographic groups of theatre arts graduates. For example, a study that examines female-identified participants and highlights gender differences related to discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations versus post-college experiences may be helpful to future research and programming. Based on several comments by female participants during their interviews, these women indicated that they may have encountered greater challenges than men with finding theatre jobs based on high levels of competition based on supply and demand, such as fewer acting roles for females in many theatre productions.

Conclusion

This qualitative study sought to explore the post-college transition process of recent theatre arts graduates. Though there has been a great deal of research on the transition into college, there is little research on the transition out of college – especially as it pertains to arts majors generally, and theatre arts graduates in particular. Specifically, this study explored perceived discrepancies between pre-graduate expectations versus actual post-college experiences, along with associated perceptions of artist identity of 20 recent theatre arts majors. This study also considered the unique aspect of theatre arts majors and explored participants' identity as artists and any change in their self-perception of their artist identity between the time of college graduation and the time of their interview after they had gone through the post-college transition process.

An analysis of the data collected across 20 individual interviews revealed that each of the study participants encountered some form of discrepancy in their post-college transition experiences. The primary responses of the participants when encountering an

unexpected outcome was to have a psychological reaction to the encountered discrepancy. Though a few of the participants took actionable steps to address the discrepancy or perceived barrier to their initial goals, all of the participants in the study had a cognitive response when they encountered a perceived discrepancy during their post-college transition experience. Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1984) was used as the theoretical perspective with which to view the post-college transition process. Transition theory examines an individual's process through personal transitions, and the four coping mechanisms by which they navigate the transition process (situation, self, support, and strategies).

In order to more fully explain the process by which participants responded to encountering perceived discrepancies between their pre-graduate expectations and post-college experiences, I proposed a model that added another dimension to Schlossberg's Transition Model (1984). The added dimension led to a modified version of the transition model by introducing the psychological response to a perceived discrepancy during the post-college transition process. The psychological response was suggested to be a "Change of Perspective," whereby the individual internalizes their response, but attributes a new way of viewing the transition process to external factors and influences.

The results of this study based on an analysis of the data collected across all 20 interviews found that each participant, to some degree on some aspect of their post-college transition, found a discrepancy between their pre-graduate expectations and their actual post-college experiences. Though a few participants found that their post-college experiences turned out better than expected, the majority of the study participants encountered unexpected and undesired outcomes in one or more areas of their post-

college transition experiences. The majority of the discrepancies were related to their careers as theatre artists, either positively or negatively, but there were also encountered discrepancies with finances and other factors.

The findings of this study led to recommendations for higher education institutions to implement undergraduate programming that supports theatre arts majors by providing post-college preparation courses, internships, and other opportunities that may help theatre arts majors become better prepared as emerging theatre artists, and to provide more tools to navigate unexpected outcomes they are likely to encounter in the highly competitive theatre industry.

The real-life stories that were collected by the participants for this study were inspiring to me as an educator, researcher, and artist. I believe the world is a better place with creative minds and souls actively contributing to our rich and varied cultural tapestry. Whatever we can do as institutions of higher education to educate and prepare our future theatre artists is an important step toward helping them with the transition to the next stage in their lives with all its many challenges and possibilities. The need to prepare emerging theatre artists for the bumpy road ahead is eloquently summed up by one who has experienced it firsthand:

I've seen a lot of friends give up immediately. They go to one audition and I hear them say, I'm never going to do that again. And that's tragic. People shouldn't feel the need to give up so easily, like I did, feeling the need that I only have a year to prove myself. I don't know what can be done about that. But every time an actor gives up – and it's even worse when they leave theatre completely – that's a whole potential of creative works that's gone from us. It's a loss. It's not a good thing, because now I have less competition. It's tragic. And whatever can be done to train people about how you can pay your bills and still act. Just something so that people know it will be hard. It will be different. You're going to be rejected a lot, so whatever can be taught to prepare for the rejection they will receive. And I don't know how to do that, but I think it's important. Because rejection is part of

an actor's life or an artist's life, and we need to be ready for it so that we don't give up. Keep on keeping on!

Naomi, study participant

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Appendix A:

Informed Consent Form and Information Sheet for Conducting Research

An Exploration of the College to Post-College Transition of Recent Theatre Arts Majors

You are invited to be in a research study on the college to post-college transition of recent theatre arts baccalaureate graduates with a B.A. or B.F.A. degree in a theatre arts/drama or equivalent theatre-related major from a public or private 4-year higher education institution in the United States. You were selected as a possible participant because you responded to a classified ad placed on MinnesotaPlaylist.com for study participants and you met the various selection criteria. Please read this form and ask any question you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Julie Darg, Doctoral Candidate,
Organizational Leadership Policy and Development, University of Minnesota

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in one interview lasting approximately 60 minutes, which will be conducted in person (if an in-person interview is not possible, then an online interview will be conducted on Skype). The interview will be recorded for transcription purposes.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject (you, the person being interviewed). Research records will be stored securely and only I will have access to the records. In addition, prior to the beginning of the interview/recording, each subject will be given a pseudonym and their actual name will not be used during the recording, nor will I refer to the name of your institution. The recording of the interview will be erased within one year of the completion of the dissertation for which this research is being conducted.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect any future professional association with the principal researcher of this study (Julie Darg) within the Twin Cities theatre community or the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

At the end of a complete and full interview, the participant (you) will receive a gift certificate from AMAZON in the amount of \$30 as a thank you for your time and contribution to this research study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Julie Darg. If you have questions after the interview, you are encouraged to contact me at dargx002@umn.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Darwin Hendel, at the University of Minnesota. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Research Subject's Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Appendix B

Research Study Recruitment Advertisement

Did you recently graduate with a theater major within the past 1-3 years? Read on!

University of Minnesota PhD candidate seeks participants for a one-hour (45-60 minutes) interview to research the experience of recent college graduates on the college to post-college transition of theatre arts majors.

Interview times are flexible and will begin late January 2017. **Compensation provided.**

To be eligible for this study you must meet ALL of the following criteria:

- 1) Graduated from a baccalaureate granting (4-year) college or university within the United States
- 2) Graduated with a B.A. or B.F.A. degree in Theatre Arts/Drama or equivalent major with the intent to pursue a career in theater
- 3) Graduated from college between December 2012 and December 2015 (between 1.5 and 3.5 years after college graduation)
- 4) Preferably (but not mandatory) living/working in the Twin Cities metropolitan area OR within a 200 mile radius of Minneapolis/St. Paul (e.g., Duluth, MN; Eau Claire, WI, etc.)
- 5) Must not have previously worked with or have prior association with the study researcher

If you meet the criteria listed above, please email the study researcher, Julie Darg, at dargx002@umn.edu for additional information about the study and the interview process. Please put “Transition Study” in email subject line.

Interview Process

- 1) If selected for the research study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher that will last approximately 1 hour
- 2) Interviews will take place in meeting rooms at local public libraries convenient for the interviewee in order to provide a private and safe environment to conduct the interview
- 3) All identifying participant data collected for the study will remain confidential and private throughout the research process, with no identifying information in the completed study
- 4) Compensation will be provided in the form of a \$30 Amazon gift certificate which will be distributed at the end of the completed interview

If you qualify for the study, please send an inquiry for additional information to the study researcher, Julie Darg, at dargx002@umn.edu. Please put “Transition Study” in email subject line.

Appendix C

Information Letter for Potential Participants for Research Study on the Post-College Transition Experiences of Theater Majors

Greetings!

Thank you for your interest in being interviewed for this research study on the college to post-college transition of recent theatre arts graduates. My name is Julie Darg and I am a graduate student in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development at the University of Minnesota. I am working on completing my PhD in Higher Education. My professional interests in college student development (particularly in relation to the post-college transition) and the theatre arts industry led me to this research topic.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the college to post-college transition of recent theatre arts baccalaureate graduates. I am specifically interested in examining the expectations and resultant experiences encountered by individuals intending to pursue a career in the theatre industry after college, and how that process impacts their identity as an artist.

In order to be selected as a participant you must meet the following criteria:

- 1) Graduated from a baccalaureate granting (4-year) college or university within the United States
- 2) Graduated with a B.A. or B.F.A. degree in Theatre Arts/Drama or equivalent major with the intent to pursue a career within the theater industry
- 3) Graduated from college between December 2012 and December 2015
- 4) Preferably (but not mandatory) living/working in the Twin Cities metropolitan area OR within a 200-mile radius (e.g., Duluth, MN; Eau Claire, WI, etc.)
- 5) Must not have worked with me, the study researcher, in a prior capacity, nor be personally acquainted with me
- 6) Must provide proof of completed bachelor's degree (*e.g., unofficial transcript*)

Please note that not all those who are interested and meet selection criteria will be selected to participate in this study. However, if you meet the above criteria and are selected as a participant, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview that will last between approximately 45 and 75 minutes (most interviews will last 1 hour). Interviews will be scheduled starting in late January 2017 and will be conducted in person at a public library convenient to you, the interviewee. The location for all interviews will be held in meeting rooms at public libraries that are visible to library patrons, which allow for privacy and a safe environment during the interview process. If weather or other unforeseen circumstances do not allow for an in-person interview, the interview may be conducted via SKYPE. Times are flexible for the interviews and may be conducted during the daytime or evening hours. Participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose to stop the interview process, are free not to choose to answer any question, or withdraw at any time.

The interview will be recorded for record keeping purposes. All data collected for the study will remain confidential and secured, and only I, as the study researcher, will have access to the recording of the interview and data materials collected. The original recording of the interview, which I will safely secure, will be erased within one year of the completion of the dissertation for which this research is being conducted.

Only general demographic information, such race and gender will be noted as part of the study for all participants. All personal, identifying information will remain anonymous, and each participant will be assigned a pseudonym for any data collected and presented in my dissertation. Only I will be aware of your identity, which will not be known to anyone but me as the researcher for this study.

If you participate in this study and complete a full interview with me, you will receive a \$30 gift certificate from Amazon as a thank you for your time and contribution to this research project. As a member of the theatre community, it is my personal belief that individuals should be compensated for their contributions, and this gift certificate is a token of that appreciation. By participating in this study, you will contribute to research in the fields of higher education and the performing arts in understanding the experiences of recent theatre arts graduates.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the following questions below to confirm eligibility for the study. (Please note that the demographic questions below are needed for demographic data collection purposes for this study only).

Please REPLY to this email and answer the questions below within the body of the email.

- What is your name?
- What is the email address you wish to be contacted through?
- What is your gender?
- What is your race?
- What is your age?
- What bachelor's degree did you receive (e.g., B.A., B.F.A.)?
- What was your college major?
- Which institution did you receive your degree from?
- When did you graduate (month and year)?
- Did you intend to pursue a career in the theatre industry upon graduation?
- What is your field of interest or career path in theater you are pursuing (e.g., actor)
- What general location (e.g., neighborhood) would be convenient for the interview?

If you wish to forward this email to anyone who you feel may be interested and eligible for this study, please feel free to do so. Please respond within two (2) days of receipt of this letter to let me know of your continued interest in being a participant in this study.

Thank you so much for your interest!

Julie Darg, Doctoral Candidate
University of Minnesota

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. Cast your mind back to your college years as a theatre arts major. Please tell me about some of the most significant experiences you had in relation to your undergraduate program as a theatre arts major.
2. Tell me about any specific preparation you had as part of your theater arts major curriculum for your life in theater after college.
3. “What were your feelings at the time of graduation and what did you expect your post-college life would be like as an artist?
4. Tell me about any plans or objectives you had for a career as an artist at the time of college graduation.
5. How did you feel about your identity as an artist at the time of graduation?
6. Please tell me the main experiences you had as a theatre artist after graduation until now.
7. Tell me about any other life factors that impacted you during your transition after college,
8. Did anything turn out differently after college than you expected in relation to your trajectory as an artist?
9. Did anything turn out differently after college than you expected in relation to other aspects in your life such as finances, relationships, or other factors?
10. In relation to pursuing a career as an artist, how did you feel/respond when things turned out differently than you expected??
11. When you think about being an artist, tell me about specific experiences or situations that have typically influenced how you perceive yourself as an artist?
12. How do you feel about your identity as an artist now? Has your perception of yourself as an artist changed at any time between college and now?
13. What do you think, if anything, could have helped you better prepare during your college years for your post-college life as an artist?